



## ABSTRACT

### An Examination of Samuel Johnson's Book Reviewing, 1742-1764

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Master of Letters  
Trinity Term, 1998

The aim of this thesis is to examine Samuel Johnson's practices as a book reviewer. Chapter One provides a context for the thesis by briefly surveying the development of book reviewing during Johnson's lifetime. Chapter Two attempts to illuminate an under-appreciated aspect of Johnson's interest in book reviewing by considering the extent to which it can be said that he commented on recently published works in the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* essay serials. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters respectively analyze Johnson's reviewing in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Literary Magazine*, and *Critical Review*. Though the emphasis here is on Johnson's reviewing technique, considerable attention is given to examining Johnson's practices in relation to competing notices published elsewhere. Overall, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that Johnson was a skillful and conscientious book reviewer, an endeavor that can only highlight further his versatility as a literary critic.

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Letters**

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## Abbreviations

*Bibliography*    *A Bibliography of Samuel Johnson*, W. P. Courtney and D. N. Smith,  
with *Johnsonian Bibliography: A Supplement to Courtney*, R. W.

Chapman and A. T. Hazen, 1984.

*CR*                *Critical Review*, 1756-1817.

*Dictionary*     Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols., 1755.

*DNB*             *Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 1917-.

*EB*                *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 1910.

*GM*                *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1731-1914.

*Letters*           *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford, 5 vols., 1994.

*Boswell's Life*   *Boswell's Life of Johnson, Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour  
to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales*,

ed. G. B. Hill, rev. L. F. Powell, 6 vols., 1934-50; vols. v and vi, 2nd ed.,  
1964.

*Lives*             *Johnson's Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G. B. Hill, 3 vols., 1905.

*LM*                *Literary Magazine*, 1756-58.

*MR*                *Monthly Review*, 1749-1845.

*NCBEL*           *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, vol. 2, 1971.

*Yale*              *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. J. H.

Middendorf, et. al., 13 volumes to date, 1958-.

## Chapter One

### Introduction: Book Reviewing In Johnson's Day

The aim of this thesis is to shed new light on Samuel Johnson's skill and conscientiousness as a book reviewer. As a means of providing a context for Johnson's work as a reviewer, however, it is necessary in this first chapter briefly to survey the development of book reviewing during the eighteenth century and to provide an overview of some of the key characteristics of the period's two most successful journals, the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*.<sup>1</sup>

Book reviewing evolved considerably during Johnson's lifetime (1709-84). In the first half of the eighteenth century, English review periodicals generally followed the pattern set by a Continental journal, Denis de Sallo's *Journal des Scavans* (1665-1753). The *Memoirs of Literature* (1710-1714), the *History of the Works of the Learned* (1737-1743), the *Literary Journal* (1744-49), and other similar publications typified early reviewing practices in that they offered basically neutral abridgments and extractions of

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<sup>1</sup> The following studies of eighteenth-century book reviewing were consulted in the composition of this chapter: James Basker, *Tobias Smollett: Critic and Journalist* (Newark, NJ: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1988); E. A. Bloom, "'Labours of the Learned': Neoclassic Book Reviewing Aims and Techniques", *Studies in Philology* liv (1957), 537-63; *British Literary Magazines: The Augustan Age and the Age of Johnson, 1698-1788*, ed. Alvin Sullivan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983); Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford, 1996); Antonia Forster, "From 'Tasters to the Public' to 'Beadles of Parnassus': Reviewers, Authors and the Reading Public, 1749-1774" (Diss. University of Melbourne, 1986); Forster, *Index to Book Reviews in England: 1749-1774* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1990); Forster, *Index to Book Reviews in England: 1775-1800* (London: the British Library, 1997); Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (New York: Nelson, 1930), pp. 196-226.

erudite books for the specialist reader. Significantly, these journals shared small circulations and relatively short lifespans.<sup>2</sup>

Though its reliance on the abridgment/extract/summary format derives from the precedent set by the earlier review journals, Ralph Griffiths's *Monthly Review* (1749-1845) very much took the practice in a new direction. Whereas the earlier review journals specifically catered to the tastes of scholars and specialists, the *Monthly* sought to appeal to a far wider readership by reviewing all sorts of newly published material. In its third number, for instance, we find the *Monthly* promising readers that it will give notice to "all new Things in general, without exception to any, on account of their lowness of rank, or price".<sup>3</sup> Equally significant is that Griffiths's journal, despite its reliance on extract and summary, regularly expressed critical judgments of the works under review. There "are few reviews, long or short, in which opinions of some sort are not given", observes Antonia Forster in her discussion of the early years of the *Monthly*. The "traditional idea of simply presenting neutral information and leaving judgment up to readers is given lip service but seldom followed".<sup>4</sup> The *Monthly*'s attempt to address the needs of the general reading public met with immediate success: monthly print quantities began at 1,000 for May 1749 and gradually climbed to 2,250 by 1756; in 1758 the figure

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<sup>2</sup> Bloom, "Labours of the Learned"; Graham, *English Literary Periodicals*; *British Literary Magazines*.

<sup>3</sup> *MR*, i. 238.

<sup>4</sup> Forster, *Book Reviews 1749-1774*, p. 6.

stood at 2,500. Ten years later, monthly print quantities had reached 3,000 and continued to climb after that, expanding to 3,500 for the year 1776.<sup>5</sup>

The *Monthly* was without serious competition until the arrival of Tobias Smollett's *Critical Review* in 1756. It is important to note here that a number of other review journals were established between 1750 and 1775, but "the reviews that really counted were those in the *Monthly* and the *Critical*", observes Antonia Forster. "For the majority of authors and booksellers they were simply 'the two Reviews' and the judgments delivered elsewhere, although they became a necessary part of most general publications and might stir up an occasional fuss, were not important".<sup>6</sup> In matters of format and approach--a reliance on extract and summary; claims to comprehensiveness; the anonymity of its contributors--the *Critical* essentially followed the *Monthly*'s successful precedent. To be sure, there are temperamental--the *Critical* demonstrated a greater degree of self-righteousness and severity--and, as Antonia Forster points out, "clear political and religious" differences between the *Monthly* and the *Critical*". However, in regard to "their methods and general literary principles" the two journals "do not differ greatly".<sup>7</sup> It is also worth noting that the *Critical* did not attain the popularity of its rival. No conclusive figures are known to exist, but evidence--slender, to be sure--

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis M. Knapp, "Griffiths's 'Monthly Review' As Printed by Strahan", *Notes and Queries* ciii (1958), 216-17.

<sup>6</sup> Antonia Forster, *Book Reviews 1749-1774*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Forster, *Book Reviews 1749-1774*, pp. 7-8; also see Donoghue, *Fame Machine*, chapters one, two, and passim; cf. *Boswell's Life*: the "authors of the Monthly Review were enemies to the Church", Johnson is reported to have told King George III; Boswell also reports Johnson as having said that the writers for the *Monthly* "are Christians with as little christianity as may be; they are for pulling down all establishments" (ii. 40; iii. 32).

suggests that the *Critical's* monthly circulation might have been half that of the *Monthly's*.<sup>8</sup> Even so, the longevity of the *Critical Review*--it remained in publication until 1817--testifies to its wide appeal.

Did the *Monthly* and *Critical* demonstrate particular attitudes toward the business of book reviewing? As commercial enterprises, the two leading review journals understandably sought to convince the public of their authority and indispensability. Take the *Monthly Review's* initial advertisement, for instance, which is evidently based on the premise that within the literary marketplace at the current moment exists a critical mass of non-specialist book-buyers who, fed up with the profusion of inferior books and deceptive advertisements, are eager to support a reliable and comprehensive guide to newly published material:

When the abuse of title-pages is obviously come to such a pass, that few readers care to take in a book, any more than a servant, without a recommendation; to acquaint the public that a summary review of the productions of the press, as they occur to notice, was perhaps never more necessary than now, would be superfluous and vain. The cure then for this general complaint is evidently, and only, to be found in a periodical work, whose sole object should be to give a compendious account of those productions of the press, as they come out, that are worth notice; an account, in short, which should, in virtue of its candour, and justness of distinction, obtain authority enough for its representations to be serviceable to such as would choose to have some idea of a book before they lay out their money or time on it.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the modestly worded "Advertisement" of the *Monthly*, the "Preface" to the first bound volume of the *Critical Review* (January/February-July 1756) is emphatic and

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<sup>8</sup> Archibald Hamilton, the *CR's* printer, supposedly declared in 1782 that the *Monthly's* circulation was double that of the *Critical's*: see Forster, *Book Reviews 1775-1800*, p. xxxiii. and n. 51.

self-righteous in its attempt to convince readers of its objectivity, discernment, and importance to the reading public. The *Critical's* reviewers, the prefatory note reads:

have declared their thoughts without prejudice, fear, or affectation; and strove to forget the author's person, while his works fell under their consideration. They have treated simple dulness as the object of mirth or compassion, according to the nature of its appearance: petulance and self-conceit they have corrected with more severe strictures; and though they have given no quarter to insolence, scurrility, and sedition, they will venture to affirm, that no production of merit has been defrauded of its due share of applause. On the contrary, they have cherished with commendation, the very faintest bloom of genius, even when vapid and unformed, in hopes of it being warmed into flavour, and afterward producing agreeable fruit by dint of proper care and culture. . . .<sup>10</sup>

As these quotations would suggest, the two leading review journals were eager to call attention to the crucial role each saw itself as playing in the literary marketplace.

Indeed, it is not unusual to find in the *Monthly* and the *Critical* self-aggrandizing references to the heavy burdens which accompany the task of regular reviewing during a particularly chaotic historical moment in the book trade. "The public are, really, more obliged to us *Reviewers* than they imagine", asserts the reviewer of *The Adventures of Devil Dick* (*Monthly Review*: December 1754). "We are necessitated to read everything that comes out, and must, consequently, submit to the vile drudgery of going through those loads of trash, which are thrown upon us".<sup>11</sup> James Kirkpatrick similarly attempts to instruct readers on the vexing issues which the *Monthly* faces as it goes about its noble

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<sup>9</sup> This "Advertisement" is bound to the first volume of the *Monthly Review* kept in the Bodleian Library (Griffiths's own copy).

<sup>10</sup> Attached to the first bound volume of the *Critical Review*.

<sup>11</sup> *MR*, xi. 470.



work in his notice of Silvester O'Halloran's *A New Treatise of the Glaucoma* (February 1753):

Some persons have imagined the scheme of a Literary Review might be so conducted, as to give general satisfaction and no offence. The great number, and difference, of books published convince us it is impossible to do this with integrity and taste: and were we to seek every occasion of palliating error, crudity and nonsense, we apprehend our approbation of pieces of true merit must soon dwindle into insipidity and insignificance, equally prejudicial to our reputation and interest.<sup>12</sup>

The *Critical* shares with the *Monthly* an interest in regularly reminding readers of the trials of contemporary book reviewing. "There is not perhaps upon earth a set of men whose fatigues are so rarely pitied, or whose labours are so seldom rewarded, as those who, like the authors of the *Critical Review*, are obliged to range over the world of Science, and travel through the extensive regions of modern literature", the reviewer of Keyser's *Travels Through Germany* declares (June 1756). "[W]e meet with so many dangers and difficulties, such bad roads, such barren and inhospitable countries, and for the most part with such indifferent entertainment, as to render us worth objects of compassion which is notwithstanding scarce ever bestowed on us". The *Critical* reviewer of the pamphlet, *An Account of the Loss of Minorca* is equally emphatic. "The task of a reviewer is like that of Sisyphus in hell. No sooner has he rolled up one heavy performance to the public view, than another tumbling down, requires an incessant repetition of his labour".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> MR, viii. 124; for the identity of the reviewers for the *Monthly* see Benjamin Nangle, *The Monthly Review, 1st ser. 1749-1789, Indexes of Contributors and Articles* (Oxford, 1934).

<sup>13</sup> CR, i. 490; iv. 94.

That the *Monthly* and the *Critical* saw themselves as occupying a prominent place in contemporary letters also finds expression in the assertiveness of their critical pronouncements. In some instances, the two leading journals apparently work to ratify what they see as their role as a stabilizing force in a chaotic marketplace by offering rousing endorsements of works--in effect, assigning a firm value to a given title--rather than merely recommending them to the public for consideration. William Duncan's translation of Julius Caesar's *Commentaries* is "the best that has yet been given us of this excellent classic", writes the reviewer for the *Monthly* (February 1753). Frances Brooke's *Virginia: A Tragedy* "is truly moral and poetical", declares the *Critical* in the April 1756 issue, there being "very few modern plays" that can match its excellence.<sup>14</sup> In other instances, reviewers emphasize their self-appointed role as arbiters of literary merit by dismissing authors under review in very stern language. The writer of *Truth Transcending Human Reason*, for example, receives a sarcastic rebuke from the *Monthly* (January 1755). "Mr. Hope's performance is of a piece with his title page. We wonder this gentleman should quarrel with *Reason*, with which it does not appear that he has the least acquaintance". The *Critical* specialized in sarcastic and heavy-handed reproaches of incompetent writers, as the review of the *Fair Citizen* bears out (July 1757). "A puny, miserable reptile has here crawl'd into existence, happily formed to elude all attack by its utter insignificance: it is indeed no small mortification to our pride, that we have been obliged to bestow even so much notice upon it, as this". In another example, the *Critical*

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<sup>14</sup> *MR*, viii. 81; *CR*, i. 279.

intensifies its rejection of *A New Method of Treating the Common Continual Fever* (July 1757) by adding a strong dose of ridicule. The author "is an enemy to *concoction*; and indeed nothing can be more *crude* than his performance", the reviewer observes, adding that the author "may number us among his patients, for we are extremely sick of his prescriptions".<sup>15</sup>

At other times, reviewers attempt to emphasize their authority by portraying themselves as tutors and well-meaning advisors to authors--though this is far less true of the *Critical*, which tended to see itself "as having not only a right but a positive moral duty to censure and repress" less capable writers.<sup>16</sup> In his review of *A New Treatise of the Glaucoma* in the *Monthly* (February 1753), for instance, James Kirkpatrick offers encouragement to the author, which follows rather blunt censures of the work itself:

if our present very warrantable judgement of this piece should excite the author to a strict revival and amendment of it, in matter and manner; or to more consistency and propriety in any future one, we shall rejoice in our ability of rendering him more useful to others and himself, as he seems to have some application.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the two leading review journals quite consciously worked to secure for themselves an influential place in contemporary letters. But how successful were they in bringing reality in line with their ambitions?

Whether the review journals actually influenced book sales has not been conclusively determined, though Antonia Forster points out that as early as 1750 many

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<sup>15</sup> *MR*, xii. 75; *CR*, iv. 86, 95.

<sup>16</sup> Forster, *Book Reviews 1749-1774*, p. 8; also see Forster, "Reviewers, Authors and the Reading Public", pp. 39-41, 82-86.

<sup>17</sup> *MR*, viii. 124.

authors and booksellers were convinced that reviews shaped buyers' opinions.<sup>18</sup> One such author was Charlotte Lennox, who in July 1756 sought from her friend Samuel Johnson an appreciative review in the *Literary Magazine* after the *Monthly* and *Critical* published what she believed to be hostile--but which were in fact courteous, if rather tepid--notices of the *Memoirs of the Countess Berci*. Lennox's anxiety over the reception of her work in the reviewing press was hardly atypical. An increasingly prominent feature of the literary landscape during the latter half of the eighteenth century are letters to newspapers and magazines from authors complaining about the injustices suffered at the hands of malicious or incompetent reviewers, a famous example being Jonas Hanway's evidently pompous and spiteful rebuttal to Johnson's 1757 review of *A Journal of Eight Days Journey* in the *Literary Magazine* (a circumstance discussed at length in Chapter Four). It must also be pointed out, however, that authors and booksellers were just as eager to exploit appreciative reviews as they were to bemoan unfavorable ones. The use of review material in the advertisement of new books quickly became "established among booksellers in general", observes Antonia Forster, appearing "both in any newspapers carrying book-advertisements and in booksellers' advertisements printed at the end (or occasionally at the beginning) of published books".<sup>19</sup>

To summarize: within a decade or so after the commencement of the *Monthly Review* in 1749, the practice of regular book reviewing had reached a fairly advanced stage. Authors increasingly connected their hopes of fame and fortune to favorable

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<sup>18</sup> Forster, *Book Reviews 1749-1774*, p. 9.

reviews, and readers were buying review journals in increasing numbers. The rapid development of regular book reviewing happened to coincide with some of the most productive years of Samuel Johnson's authorial career, so it is not much of a surprise to find that he wrote a fair number of reviews himself: more than fifty are firmly accepted as his, while nearly as many others are tentatively attributed to him. The aim of this thesis is to examine Johnson's technique as a book reviewer. Chapter Two seeks to illuminate an under-appreciated aspect of Johnson's underlying interest in the practice of book reviewing by considering the extent to which it can be said that he commented on--in effect, reviewed--recently published titles in the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* essay serials. Chapters Three, Four, and Five respectively survey Johnson's reviewing for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Literary Magazine*, and the *Critical Review*. In these chapters, Johnson's practices are analyzed in relation to competing reviews published elsewhere. Only by following this method can we understand fully Johnson's skill and conscientiousness as a reviewer. Johnson's reviews are generally thought of as critically slight pieces. This is so, perhaps, because students of Johnson tend to evaluate the reviews by the light of his monumental critical works such as the *Lives of the Poets* and the *Rambler* essays. When Johnson's own objectives and the practices of his contemporaries are considered, however, Johnson's reviews for the most part emerge as deftly executed critical essays.

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *Letters*, i. 136 and notes; Forster, *Book Reviews 1749-1774*, pp. 9-14.

## Chapter Two

### Book Reviewing in the Moral Essays: Johnson's Commentary on Recently

#### Published Titles in the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler*

Perhaps a useful place to start in exploring Johnson's work as a book reviewer is to consider the extent to which it can be said that he commented on recently published titles in the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* papers. That a mere nine of Johnson's 335 serial essays--*Ramblers* 4, 77, 121, 139, 154; *Adventurers* 85, 92, 137; *Idler* 65--fall into this category is not at all surprising given that these works on the whole are best known for their timeless and universal character. Nevertheless, it can be argued that these few essays not only reflect Johnson's interest in the contemporary literary world, but they also suggest that he found the practice of evaluating recently published works--in effect, book reviewing--to be a worthy form of literary criticism.

Two of these essays are already known as allusive commentaries on recently published works. It is widely taken for granted that *Rambler* 4 (March 1750) means to attack Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random* (1748) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and, implicitly, to contrast these titles with the novels of Samuel Richardson as part of its broader commentary on the realistic novel.<sup>1</sup> And as James Woodruff has argued in his 1982 essay on the contemporary context of the *Rambler*, Johnson's complaint about the

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<sup>1</sup> See *Yale*, iii. 19, note 1. The *Yale* editors incorrectly claim that it was Arthur Murphy who originally made the connection between recent novels and *Rambler* 4; in fact it was Alexander Chalmers who first stated that *Rambler* 4 means to comment on *Tom Jones* and *Roderick Random*: see *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. A New Edition in twelve volumes. With an Essay on his Life and Genius, by Arthur Murphy*, ed. Alexander Chalmers (London: J. Johnson, J. Nichols and Son, R. Baldwin, et. al., 1806), iv. 26.

recent profusion of Spenserian imitations in number 121 appears to have been written specifically with the *Four Seasons*, by Moses Mendez, and the *Progress of Envy*, by Robert Lloyd, in mind.<sup>2</sup> But perhaps a more likely target of *Rambler* 121, or an at least an additional possible target, is Gilbert West's *Education: A Poem in Two Cantos, Written in Imitation of the Style and Manner of Spenser's Faerie Queene*. *Rambler* 121 appeared on 14 May 1751, less than seven weeks after the publication of West's poem on 28 March 1751.<sup>3</sup> Johnson argues in the *Rambler* essay that, however meritorious are Spenser's "sentiments and fiction", his stanza and diction are plainly unworthy of imitation. Spenser's "stile was in his own time allowed to be vicious", Johnson observes, "so darkened with old words and peculiarities of phrase, and so remote from common use, that [Ben] Johnson boldly pronounces him 'to have written no language'". Particularly distressing to Johnson is that the lamentable trend in Spenserian imitations "seems likely to gain upon the age" thanks to "the influence of some men of learning and genius".<sup>4</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Johnson in these passages alludes to Gilbert West.

Indeed, it is worth considering for a moment the similarities between what Johnson says in *Rambler* 121 and his later observations on West in the *Lives of the Poets*. In the *Lives*, Johnson pays homage to West's talent as an imitator of Spenser even as he

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<sup>2</sup> See James Woodruff, "Johnson's *Rambler* in its Contemporary Context", *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* xxxv (1982), pp. 53-54; for the trend in Spenserian imitations during the eighteenth century see *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 396-99

<sup>3</sup> For the publication date of West's poem see Ralph Straus, *Robert Dodsley: Poet, Playwright and Publisher* (London: John Lane, 1910), p. 342.

<sup>4</sup> *Yale*, iv. 284-85.

acknowledges that West's poetic gifts are placed in the service of an unworthy end.

West's Spenserian imitations, Johnson writes,

are very successfully performed, both with respect to the metre, the language, and the fiction; and being engaged at once by the excellence of the sentiments and the artifice of the copy the mind has two amusements together. But such compositions are not to be reckoned among the great achievements of intellect, because their effect is local and temporary; they appeal not to reason or passion, but to memory, and presuppose an accidental or artificial state of mind. An imitation of Spenser is nothing to a reader, however acute, by whom Spenser has never been perused.<sup>5</sup>

It is certainly possible to read this passage as a complement to the observations found in *Rambler* 121--though we should not forget that Johnson's essay strives to make broader points about the recent trend in Spenserian imitations and about literary imitations in general.

The least obviously topical of the nine essays considered in this chapter is *Rambler* 77, entitled "The learned seldom despised but when they deserve contempt" by the *Yale* editors. In many ways, number 77 typifies Johnson's manner of proceeding in the *Rambler*. Johnson begins by pondering a commonplace: the universal authorial habit of bemoaning the contemporary neglect of literary merit. "Among those, whose hopes of distinction or riches, arise from an opinion of their intellectual attainments, it has been, from age to age, an established custom to complain of the ingratitude of mankind to their instructors", Johnson observes, "and the discouragement which men of genius and study suffer from avarice and ignorance, from the prevalence of false taste, and the encroachment of barbarity". In exploring the legitimacy of this commonplace, Johnson is



soon led to a discussion of "loose or profane" authors. Many writers "have dared to boast of neglected merit, and to challenge their age for cruelty and folly, of whom it cannot be alleged that they have endeavoured to increase the wisdom or virtue of their readers".<sup>6</sup>

From here, Johnson goes on to argue that the pains of hell are a condign punishment for writers who deliberately misuse their talents:

Those, whom God has favoured with superiour faculties, and made eminent for quickness of intuition, and accuracy of distinctions, will certainly be regarded as culpable in his eye, for defects and deviations which, in souls less enlightened, may be guiltless. But, surely, none can think without horror on that man's condition, who has been more wicked in proportion as he had more means of excelling in virtue, and used the light imparted from heaven only to embellish folly, and shed lustre upon crimes.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly *Rambler 77* can be profitably studied as an extreme expression of Johnson's basic position on the moral purposes of authorship. A comparison of the specifics of the essay and Johnson's "Life of Otway" (1779), however, suggests that at some level *Rambler 77* was meant to address the recent popularity of Thomas Otway's plays, specifically the *Orphan* and *Venice Preserv'd*.

*Rambler 77* was published on 11 December 1750, only weeks after several performances of the *Orphan* (18-19 October) and *Venice Preserv'd* (24, 25, 27 October) were given at the Drury Lane Theater (run by Johnson's friend David Garrick). Both tragedies were performed several times earlier in the year as well, as was Otway's grossly

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<sup>5</sup> *Lives*, iii. 332.

<sup>6</sup> *Yale*, iv. 40-42.

<sup>7</sup> *Yale*, iv. 44.

ribald comedy *Friendship in Fashion*.<sup>8</sup> The *Orphan* and *Venice* feature obscene or lewd material, though the bawdy scenes in *Venice* were customarily expurgated during the eighteenth century. Significantly, Johnson's concern in *Rambler* 77 is not with run-of-the-mill writers of libertine literature but with highly successful, perhaps even canonical, authors--as Otway was by 1750--whose alluring portrayals of vice work to undermine civilized society. "It has been the settled purpose of some writers, whose powers and acquisitions place them high in the ranks of literature, to set fashion on the side of wickedness", Johnson observes, "to recommend debauchery, and lewdness, by associating them with qualities most likely to dazzle the discernment, and attract the affections; and to show innocence and goodness with such attendant weaknesses as necessarily expose them to contempt and derision". These remarks can be said to apply to *Venice Preserv'd*, but they are particularly relevant to the *Orphan*, which centered not on the intrigues of the court but on domestic life in rural Bohemia. "Polydore", one of the lead characters, is a roguish figure--witness his exposition of amoral sexuality at the end of Act One and his willingness to cuckold his brother--but his plain-spokenness and boldness command admiration, and he is not without moralistic impulses.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, "Polydore" can be aptly described as a prototype for the amiable yet vice-laden characters who dominate the realistic novels discussed in *Rambler* 4.

The allusive attacks on Otway in *Rambler* 77 conform to opinions expressed in Johnson's "Life of Otway" (1779). Take for instance Johnson's apparent reluctance to

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<sup>8</sup> See the *London Stage, Part 4*, i. 213-16, and *passim*.

acknowledge the enduring popularity of the *Orphan*. "This is one of the few plays that keep possession of the stage", Johnson states, "and has pleased for almost a century through all the vicissitudes of dramattick fashion". Given Johnson's well known faith in the common reader and his equally famous pronouncements on the unerring judgment of posterity, one might expect to find in the "Life of Otway" a closely reasoned justification for the high value assigned to the *Orphan* by generations of theater-goers. Yet Johnson seems more interested in excusing, rather than in ratifying, what he sees as the public's ill-considered fondness for the play:

Of this play nothing new can easily be said. It is a domestick tragedy drawn from middle life. Its whole power is upon the affections, for it is not written with much comprehension of thought or elegance of expression. But if the heart is interested, many other beauties may be wanting, yet not missed.<sup>10</sup>

Johnson's observations on *Venice Preserv'd* are equally hedged:

By comparing this with his *Orphan* it will appear that his images were by time become stronger, and his language more energetick. The striking passages are in every mouth; and the publick seems to judge rightly of the faults and excellencies of this play, that it is the work of a man not attentive to decency nor zealous for virtue; but of one who conceived forcibly and drew originally by consulting nature in his own breast.<sup>11</sup>

Here, Johnson acknowledges that the fame of *Venice Preserv'd*, and of Otway's work in general, is essentially well deserved. On the other hand, in Johnson's view Otway's

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<sup>9</sup> See *The Orphan*, I. 362-77; III. 408-29, in *The Works of Thomas Otway: Plays, Poems, and Love-Letters*, ed. J. C. Gosh (Oxford, 1932), ii. 19, 45-46.

<sup>10</sup> *Lives*, i. 245.

<sup>11</sup> *Lives*, i. 246.

licentiousness--both in his writings and, as is implied here, in his personal life as well--debars him from the front rank of poets and dramatists.<sup>12</sup>

Scarcely less significant are the detailed similarities between the private conduct of the profane author allusively discussed in *Rambler* 77 and events in Otway's life as related in Johnson's biography. Those writers who committed themselves to making allies out of fashion and amorality "naturally found intimates among the corrupt, the thoughtless, and the intemperate", Johnson states in the *Rambler*:

passed their lives amidst the levities of sportive idleness, or the warm professions of drunken friendship; and fed their hopes with the promises of wretches, whom their precepts had taught to scoff at truth. But when fools had laughed away their sprightliness, and the langours of excess could no longer be relieved, they saw their protectors hourly drop away, and wondered and stormed to find themselves abandoned. Whether their companions persisted in wickedness or returned to virtue, they were left equally without assistance; for debauchery is selfish and negligent, and from virtue the virtuous only can expect regard.

In the *Lives*, Johnson describes Otway's sybaritic lifestyle in remarkably similar terms:

Otway is said to have been at this time [late 1670s] a favourite companion of the dissolute wits. But, as he who desires no virtue in his companion has no virtue in himself, those whom Otway frequented had no purpose of doing more for him than to pay his reckoning. They desired only to drink and laugh; their fondness was without benevolence, and their familiarity without friendship. Men of wit, says one of Otway's biographers, received at that time no favour from the Great but to share their riots; 'from which they were dismissed again to their own narrow circumstances. Thus they languished in poverty without the support of innocence'.<sup>13</sup>

Of interest here is that Johnson quotes from the anonymous prefatory essay to the 1712 collected edition of Otway's works, which he may have read at some point before

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756), which suggests that Otway's

composing *Rambler* 77.<sup>14</sup> It is even possible that some of the numerous quotations from Otway's works in Johnson's *Dictionary*, which was still being compiled when *Rambler* 77 was written, were drawn from this 1712 edition or later reprintings of it.<sup>15</sup>

One other similarity between the *Rambler* essay and the "Life" is worth mentioning. In *Rambler* 77 Johnson asserts that profane writers are fit subjects for legal prosecution:

What were their motives, or what their excuses, is below the dignity of reason to examine. If having extinguished in themselves the distinction of right and wrong, they were insensible of the mischief which they promoted, they deserved to be hunted down by the general compact, as no longer partaking of social nature; if influenced by the corruption of patrons, or readers, they sacrificed their own convictions to vanity or interest, they were to be abhorred with more acrimony than he that murders for pay; since they committed greater crimes without greater temptations.<sup>16</sup>

In the *Lives*, the bitter fruits of Otway's dissolution are set forth in similar terms. "Having been compelled by necessities to contract debts, and hunted, as is supposed, by the terriers of the law", Johnson writes, Otway "retired to a publick house on Tower-hill, where he is said to have died of want".<sup>17</sup> Of course, the circumstances here are not identical--*Rambler* 77 refers to legal prosecution for obscenity; in the "Life" Johnson refers to Otway's attempt to avoid debtor's prison--but as Brian Corman has pointed out in

poetry is on equal footing with Alexander Pope's (pp. iii-xi).

<sup>13</sup> Yale, iv. 42-43; *Lives*, i. 243.

<sup>14</sup> *The Works of Mr. Thomas Otway*, 2 vols. (London, 1712); the prefatory "Some Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Thomas Otway" is not paginated.

<sup>15</sup> *Venice Preserv'd*, for instance, is quoted in the *Dictionary* definition of "Brigantine"; quotations from the *Orphan* appear in the definitions of "Fortune" and "Ward"; for reprintings of the 1712 edition see Otway, *Works*, i. 81-82.

<sup>16</sup> Yale, iv. 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Lives*, i. 247.

his analysis of the "Life of Otway", Johnson's loathing of Otway's dissipated habits evidently left him strikingly unsympathetic to Otway's trials.<sup>18</sup> "Unsympathetic", in fact, aptly sets Johnson's "Life" apart from the harshly condemnatory *Rambler* 77. The allusive idiom of the *Rambler* series, it seems, allowed Johnson to express deeply held views that would not have been appropriate in the prefatory material to the *Works of the English Poets*, which was retailed as a definitive collection of England's most distinguished poets.

Though ostensibly concerned with a play written in the previous century, *Rambler* 139 (July 1751), "a critical examination of *Samson Agonistes*" as it is entitled by the Yale editors, is very much rooted in contemporary circumstance. If "there is any writer whose genius can embellish impropriety, and whose authority can make error venerable", Johnson states early in the essay, "his works are the proper objects of critical inquisition". The chief objective of *Rambler* 139 is stated clearly enough here, but the specific event which inspired Johnson to write the essay in the first place is given a brief, allusive mention two sentences later. "The tragedy *Samson Agonistes* has been celebrated as the second work of the great author of *Paradise Lost*", Johnson observes, "and opposed with all the confidence of triumph to the dramattick performances of other nations". It isn't Milton's failings per se that prompted Johnson to write *Rambler* 139, it is suggested here, but the recent pronouncements of critics, who have lavished what Johnson sees as indiscriminate praise on one of Milton's less worthy productions. The critical work in

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<sup>18</sup> Brian Corman, "Johnson and Profane Authors: the Lives of Otway and Congreve", *Johnson After Two*

question is almost certainly the 1750 edition of *Paradise Lost*, superintended by a former Lichfield grammar schoolmate of Johnson's, Thomas Newton. In his prefatory "Life of Milton", Newton avers that *Samson Agonistes* "is written in the very spirit of the Ancients, and equals, if not exceeds, any of the most perfect tragedies, which were exhibited on the Athenian stage, when Greece was in its Glory".<sup>19</sup> It is possible that Johnson perused Newton's volume itself, or he may have read the review of *Paradise Lost* in the January 1750 issue of the *Monthly Review*, which reproduced the controversial passage quoted here. Whatever the case, *Rambler* 139 is as much a rebuke to an incautious contemporary critic as it is an unvarnished assessment of *Samson Agonistes*.

*Rambler* 154 evidently means to comment on the recently published English translation of Jean Jacques Rousseau's inaugural work, *The Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. The *Discourse* was originally given as a paper at the Academy of Dijon in 1750. The Academy awarded Rousseau first prize for his discussion of the proposition: whether the arts and sciences had tended toward the improvement of morals.<sup>20</sup>

Essentially, Rousseau asserts that the maturation of civilization has yielded nothing but vice, despair, and criminality. Whether "we turn over the annals of the world, or supply the defects of uncertain chronicles by philosophical searches, we shall not find that the origin of human knowledge answers, in any degree, the ideas we form of it", Rousseau

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*Hundred Years*, pp. 225-44.

<sup>19</sup> *Yale*, iv. 370-71; "The Life of Milton", *Paradise Lost*, ed. Thomas Newton, 2nd ed. (London, 1750), i. lxii; also see Clifford, *Young Sam Johnson*, pp. 30, 56; *MR*, ii. 207.

<sup>20</sup> The prize--a gold medal worth 300 livre (equal to 330 francs, ca. 1900)--was awarded in July 1750. For a full discussion of the *Discourse*--its origins, its reception in France--see Maurice Cranston, *Jean-*

argues, "astronomy was begot by superstition, eloquence sprung from ambition, hatred, flattery, and falshood; geometry is a child of avarice, physics rose from vain curiosity; and all, even morality itself, are effects of human pride".<sup>21</sup>

Rousseau goes on to contend that the maturation of professional letters and the attendant evolution of scholarly and aesthetic standards have worked to demean genius. The promising author, if "he has the misfortune to be born among a people" who value learning, inevitably "must lower his genius to the level of the age, and rather apply to mean things which will raise admiration in his own days, than attempt at sublime works which will only shine long after his decease". To lend further credibility to his thesis, Rousseau invokes a lately celebrated iconoclast: "Tell us, thou celebrated *Voltaire*, how many nervous energick sentiments thou hast been forced to sacrifice to our false delicacy, and at what expence of noble ideas thou hast complied with the present spirit of gallantry so productive of mean ones"? Rousseau concludes with an exhortation on the superiority of self-revelation to traditional forms of learning. "O virtue! thou sublime science of simple souls!", Rousseau exclaims, "need we be at such pains to discover thee? Are not they principles engraven on every heart? to learn thy precepts, we need only turn our eyes inward on ourselves, and hearken to the voice of conscience commanding silence to our passions". It is worth noting that Rousseau tempers his argument in the final paragraphs, as he acknowledges that the intellectually gifted can make good use of traditional studies.

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*Jacques: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-1754* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), chapter thirteen.

<sup>21</sup> *The Discourse on Whether the Re-establishment of Arts and Sciences has contributed to the refining of Manners* (London, 1751), p. 32.



"If any one must be permitted the study of arts and sciences, it should be only those who find strength enough of soul within them", Rousseau observes.<sup>22</sup>

William Bowyer's 1751 translation of Rousseau's *Discourse*, the first in English, was favorably reviewed in the August 1751 issue of the *Monthly Review*. Though brief objections to Rousseau's main argument are offered, the reviewer ultimately endorses Rousseau's volume. Take for instance the review's opening sentence, which calls attention to the *Discourse*'s burgeoning fame. "This piece has been published sometime, in the language in which it was deliver'd, and hath attracted a large share of the public attention". While it is true that Rousseau's arguments "have more of sophistry than demonstration in them", the reviewer says, it must also be acknowledged that the author "is a compleat master of the declamatory art". Indeed, it was Rousseau's rhetorical prowess--exclusive of his ideas--that impressed the Dijon panel. On awarding him the prize, the reviewer relates, the judges at Dijon told Rousseau:

that he did not so much owe this precedence, in their opinion, to his hypothesis, and the arguments he brought to support it, as to his superior art and skill in handling the subject, above that of his competitors: so that, in fact, they looked upon himself and his fine talents as an example that ought to weigh much against the principles he had employed them to defend.<sup>23</sup>

Johnson must have bristled at what was in his view Rousseau's profoundly dishonest characterization of the relation between the flowering of genius and formal study.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Rousseau, *Discourse*, pp. 39-41, 56-59.

<sup>23</sup> *MR*, v. 237; the reviewer here paraphrases Bowyer's preface: see *Discourse*, pp. iii-iv.

<sup>24</sup> That the fruition of genius depends on formal study is a major thematic element in Johnson's critical writings, particularly in the *Lives of the Poets*: see, for instance, the "Life of Butler": "Imagination is useless without knowledge: nature gives in vain the power of combination, unless study and observation

Doubtless a personal element entered the picture as well: by the light of Rousseau's thesis, Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) might easily be dismissed as a useless if not a pernicious enterprise. The credibility given to Rousseau by the Dijon Academy, an institution supposedly devoted to advancing scholarly inquiry, and the *Monthly Review*, a self-professed arbiter of literary taste, must have been even more unsettling and thus called for an immediate response. The dates of the review (29 August) and that of *Rambler* 154 (7 September) are close enough to suggest coincidence, but it is worth recalling that *Rambler* essays were routinely "written in haste as the moment pressed", as Boswell tells us, "without even being read over by him before they were printed". The printer of the *Monthly* was William Strahan, who at the time also held the contract to print Johnson's *Dictionary* and who served as an intermediary of sorts between Johnson and his sponsoring booksellers. Johnson "must have been in almost daily contact" with his printer at least from the early months of 1750 until the *Dictionary* was ready for publication, observes J. A. Cochrane in his biography of Strahan, so it is not at all hard to imagine Johnson glancing at the August 1751 issue of the *Monthly* as it was being readied for publication. The *Monthly*, like most contemporary periodicals, was normally

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supply materials to be combined", and the "Life of Rochester": "In all his works there is sprightliness and vigour, and every where may be found tokens of a mind which study might have carried to excellence" (*Lives*, i. 212, 226); also see *Rambler* 25: genius "is like fire in flint, only to be produced by collision with a proper subject" (*Yale*, iii. 139); for further analysis see Jean Hagstrum, *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minn. Press, 1952), pp. 3-20.

published on the first day of the month following the date given on the title page, so the August 1751 issue probably appeared on 1 September, or a day or so afterward.<sup>25</sup>

The rhetorical strategy of number 154 is very much typical of the *Rambler* series. Johnson begins with a commonplace--in this case the indispensability of traditional scholarship to worthwhile literary achievement--which is followed by an analysis of its validity. The essay finishes with a vigorous affirmation of the essential soundness of the commonplace.<sup>26</sup> Those who wish to "become eminent" in the world of letters must first "search books" and then "contemplate nature", Johnson declares. A rather self-evident piece of wisdom, yet authors nowadays increasingly ignore plainly sound advice in the hopes of discovering shortcuts to celebrity:

The mental disease of the present generation, is impatience of study, contempt of the great masters of ancient wisdom, and a disposition to rely wholly upon unassisted genius and natural sagacity. The wits of these happy days have discovered a way to fame, which the dull caution of our laborious ancestors durst never attempt; they cut the knots of sophistry which it was formerly the business of years to untie, solve difficulties by sudden irradiations of intelligence, and comprehend long processes of argument by immediate intuition.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Boswell's Life*, i. 203, and note 6; also see *Boswell's Life*, iii. 42; J. A. Cochrane, *Dr. Johnson's Printer: the Life of William Strahan* (London: Routledge, 1964), pp. 22-29, 103, 145; Clifford, *Young Sam Johnson*, p. 281. The date given here for the *MR* is taken from the head of the "Monthly Catalogue" section. For Johnson's opinion of Rousseau as expressed in private conversation see *Boswell's Life*, ii. 11-12, 74. For a comparative analysis of Rousseau and Johnson see Mark Temmer, *Samuel Johnson and Three Infidels: Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1988). Surprisingly, *Rambler* 154 and its companions *Adventurers* 85 and 137 are not considered in Temmer's study. Also see Richard B. Sewall, "Dr. Johnson, Rousseau, and Reform", *The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to C. B. Tinker*, ed. F. W. Hilles (New Haven, 1949), pp. 307-17. In his comparative evaluation of Rousseau and Johnson as social reformers Sewall offhandedly notes that a connection between *Rambler* 154 and the *Discourse* might exist, though no analysis is offered (p. 314).

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of Johnson's rhetorical strategy in the *Rambler* see Leopold Damrosch, "Johnson's Manner of Proceeding in the *Rambler*", *English Literary History* xl (1973), 70-98.

<sup>27</sup> *Yale*, v. 55.

The "unassisted genius" concept is really nothing more than an apologia for sloth and vainglory, Johnson goes on to argue, and the empty pretensions of those who think of themselves as endowed with "natural sagacity" is soon unmasked when put to any serious test. "The laurels which superficial acuteness gains in triumphs over ignorance unsupported by vivacity, are observed by Locke to be lost whenever real learning and rational diligence appear against her", Johnson observes. The "sallies of gaiety are soon repressed by calm confidence, and the artifices of subtilty are readily detected by those who having carefully studied the question, are not easily confounded or surprised".<sup>28</sup> The rebukes to Rousseau here are obvious enough, but also worth noting is the scorned heaped on the Dijon Academy for its poor judgment.

It is also possible to read a pair of later essays--*Adventurers* 85 (August 1753) and 137 (February 1754)--as reactions to the publication of subsequent editions of Rousseau's volume. What prompted Johnson to resume his attack on the concepts espoused in the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* is a matter for speculation. However much controversy Rousseau's treatise may have stirred up in France, the *Discourse* did not arouse particularly high levels of sustained public interest in England.<sup>29</sup> No critical discussion of the *Discourse* or its themes appears in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1752-53; nor does one find references to the work, or notices of treatises designed to refute or extend Rousseau's thesis, in the *Monthly* during the same period. Even so, the *Discourse* evidently attracted enough reader interest to justify subsequent editions. The "Books

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<sup>28</sup> *Yale*, v. 56.

Published" section of the April 1752 issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, for instance, gives notice to a new edition of Rousseau's volume, translated into English by Richard Wynne; this listing is repeated in the February 1753 number of the *Gentleman's*. A "fourth edition" of Bowyer's 1751 translation, carrying a Dublin imprint, appeared in 1752.<sup>30</sup> The literary marketplace's endorsement of Rousseau's ideas, Johnson appears to have thought, was just the sort of subject that the *Adventurer*, a twice-weekly essay serial patterned on the *Rambler*, was meant to consider.<sup>31</sup>

For readers of *Rambler* 154 there is nothing substantively new in *Adventurer* 85. We begin as we do in the earlier essay with a commonplace (taken from Bacon's essay, "Of Studies"): "reading makes a full man, conversation a ready man, and writing an exact man".<sup>32</sup> The recent ascendancy of a theory which disparages traditional learning is mentioned--

An opinion has of late been, I know not how, propagated among us, that libraries are filled only with useless lumber; that men of parts stand in need of no assistance; and that to spend life in poring upon books, is only to imbibe prejudices, to obstruct and embarrass the powers of nature, to cultivate memory at the expence of judgement, and to bury reason under a chaos of indigested learning.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For the reception of the *Discourse* in France see Cranston, *Rousseau*, chapter thirteen.

<sup>30</sup> *GM*, xxii. 195; xxiii. 103.

<sup>31</sup> For a consideration of Johnson's involvement in the *Adventurer* see Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 109-16.

<sup>32</sup> *Yale*, ii. 411-12, and note 1. Rousseau's *Discourse* evidently meant to attack "everything" that Bacon "stood for", observes Maurice Cranston. "The Baconian dream of improving man's life on earth by creating material abundance, Rousseau condemns as a culpable craving for luxury; and luxury, he says, is not a simple evil but one which has always been recognized by the wisest men as an especially corrupting evil" (Cranston, *Rousseau*, pp. 231-32).

<sup>33</sup> *Yale*, ii. 412.

--followed by assertions that such popularity is unwarranted. Familiar material is placed in evidence. How is it that previous generations, "equally participating of the bounties of nature with ourselves" have written nothing worthy of our attentions, Johnson wonders. And what does such a theory suggest about the wisdom of its proponents--Rousseau in particular? When "an author declares, that he has been able to learn nothing from the writings of his predecessors", Johnson states:

and such a declaration has been lately made, nothing but a degree of arrogance unpardonable in the greatest human understanding, can hinder him from perceiving, that he is raising prejudices against his own performance; for with what hopes of success can he attempt that, in which greater abilities have hitherto miscarried? or with what peculiar force does he suppose himself invigorated, that difficulties hitherto invincible should give way before him?<sup>34</sup>

As *Adventurer* 85 develops, Johnson continues to raise doubts about Rousseau's character and judgment. "It will, I believe, be found invariably true, that learning was never decried by any learned man", Johnson declares, "and what credit can be given to those, who venture to condemn that which they do not know"? Shrillness of this kind almost certainly reflects a belief that Rousseau's ideas on natural genius have acquired a measure of legitimacy and are continuing to gain authority.<sup>35</sup>

Of special interest to Johnson, it seems, is that Rousseau's ideas demean the humbler but most widely beneficent of authorial occupations such as translating, compiling, and news-writing. As Johnson almost certainly knew from his own wide experiences in the book trade, such occupations were attracting authors in great numbers,

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<sup>34</sup> *Yale*, ii. 413.

many of them equipped with solid but undistinguished literary abilities. Rousseau's theories--particularly the closing paragraphs of the *Discourse*, where Rousseau admits that the sciences are useful only to the brightest of scholars and that ordinary people are better served by ignorance--would encourage aspiring authors to reject worthy but unglamorous employments in favor of consulting their consciences, their imaginative muses or, more likely, their sense of self-importance with the understanding that unleashing the genius inside is a more reliable path to fame and fortune. In response, Johnson offers a rigorous apologia for scholarly diligence, emphasizing the lofty social and moral purposes of authorship, and--somewhat unusual for Johnson--downplaying the role of genius in the discovery and transmission of knowledge. Very few of us have the ability to make even modest additions to the stock of human knowledge, Johnson declares. Rather,

the greatest part of mankind must owe all their knowledge, and all must owe far the larger part of it, to the information of others. To understand the works of celebrated authors, to comprehend their systems, and retain their reasonings, is a task more than equal to common intellects; and he is by no means to be accounted useless or idle, who has stored his mind with acquired knowledge, and can detail it occasionally to others who have less leisure or weaker abilities.<sup>36</sup>

Johnson's remarks here amount to a spirited denunciation of Rousseau's claim that traditional scholarly and aesthetic standards undermine what Rousseau insists is our intrinsic sense of goodwill. In *Adventurer* 85 Johnson not only seeks to expose

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<sup>35</sup> *Yale*, ii. 412.

<sup>36</sup> *Yale*, ii. 413.

Rousseau's reasoning as meretricious, but he also strives to affirm the humane uses of even the most basic of authorial tasks.

Appearing in February 1754, *Adventurer* 137 ostensibly means to reflect on the worthiness of the entire *Adventurer* series, which was scheduled to end after the publication of the 140th number. The scope of the essay, however, quickly broadens to encompass a topic of much greater contemporary significance. "As I shall soon cease to write *Adventurers*, I could not forbear lately to consider what has been the consequence of my labours", Johnson states. "That I have intended well, I have the attestation of my own heart; but good intentions may be frustrated, when they are executed without suitable skill, or directed to an end unattainable in itself". There is perhaps a formulaic element at work here--the *Rambler* had closed on a similarly introspective note, as would the *Idler* series in 1760--but we can also read the preceding sentence as the opening statement of a rebuttal to Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*. What Johnson sets out to do, in other words, is to evaluate rigorously the proposition that literature obstructs the social and ethical progress of humanity. "Some there are, who leave writers very little room for self congratulation", Johnson observes in what can be read as an allusion to Rousseau's *Discourse*,

some who affirm, that books have no influence upon the public, that no age was ever made better by its authors, and that to call upon mankind to correct their manners, is, like Xerxes, to scourge the wind or shackle the torrent. This opinion they pretend to support by unfailing experience. The world is full of fraud and corruption, rapine and malignity; interest is the ruling motive of mankind, and every one is endeavouring to increase his



own stores of happiness and perpetual accumulation, without reflecting upon the numbers whom his superfluity condemns to want. . . .<sup>37</sup>

Much of the essay is given over to a consideration of the merits of the position set forth here. True enough, Johnson admits, not even the most celebrated works of morality have managed to alter the general prevalence of "corruption, malevolence, and rapine". Making matters worse is the scarcity of readers receptive to literature's preceptorial ends. "The book that is read most, is read by few, compared with those that read it not", Johnson states, "and of those few, the greater part peruse it with dispositions that very little favour their own improvement".<sup>38</sup>

The allowances granted to the Rousseauian perspective, however, ultimately give occasion for Johnson to emphasize the exalted standing of authorship in society. "Books of morality are daily written, yet its influence is still little in the world; so the ground is annually ploughed, and yet multitudes are in want of bread", Johnson observes:

But, surely, neither the labours of the moralist nor of the husbandman are vain; let them for a while neglect their tasks, and their usefulness will be known; the wickedness that is now frequent would become universal, the bread that is now scarce would wholly fail.<sup>39</sup>

As for the frivolous motives of most readers: books "have always a secret influence on the understanding; we cannot at pleasure obliterate ideas", Johnson declares,

he that reads books of science, though without any fixed desire of improvement, will grow more knowing; he that entertains himself with moral or religious treatises, will imperceptibly advance in goodness; the

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<sup>37</sup> *Yale*, ii. 488.

<sup>38</sup> *Yale*, ii. 488-90.

<sup>39</sup> *Yale*, ii. 489.

ideas which are often offered to the mind will at last find a lucky moment when it is disposed to receive them.<sup>40</sup>

Of significance here is that Johnson takes a position at the very extreme from Rousseau's. Far from being hopelessly ineffectual at advancing the human condition, Johnson thus argues, literature has done more good than we can ever determine.

*Adventurer* 92 (September 1753) attempts to shed new light on Virgil's *Eclogues*. "Dubius", Johnson's fictional correspondent, offers readers "such observations as have risen to my mind in the consideration of Virgil's pastorals, without any enquiry how far my sentiments deviate from established rules or common opinions". Though Virgil's "general merit has been universally acknowledged", "Dubius" avers, his achievement as a writer of pastorals may have been overstated. Indeed, "if we except the first and the tenth" of Virgil's *Eclogues*, "Dubius" observes, "they seem liable either wholly or in part to considerable objections". Interestingly enough, the critical survey of Virgil's *Eclogues* which follows is based on the recently published translation of Virgil by Johnson's friend Joseph Warton, thus suggesting that a collateral objective of *Adventurer* 92 is to generate public interest in Warton's edition.<sup>41</sup>

The occasion for *Idler* 65 (14 July 1759) is the recent posthumous publication of the *Continuation of the History of the Grand Rebellion*, by Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (1609-74). The main objective of the essay is to explore "the common fate of posthumous compositions", but Johnson begins by heralding the factual reliability and

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<sup>40</sup> Yale, ii. 491.

<sup>41</sup> Yale, ii. 417-24; Warton's *Works of Virgil in Latin and English* was published on 25 January 1753 (Straus, *Robert Dodsley*, p. 346); *Adventurer* 92 appeared on 22 September 1753.

literary meritoriousness of the *Continuation*. The *Continuation* is "an accession to English literature equally agreeable to the admirers of elegance and the lovers of truth", Johnson declares", many doubtful facts may now be ascertained, and many questions, after long debate, may be determined by decisive authority". Of special interest here is that Johnson's essay essentially amounts to a book review, appearing as it did within weeks of the work's publication and ahead of notices published in the *Monthly* and *Critical*--both of which applauded the volume in terms similar to those of *Idler* 65.<sup>42</sup>

To summarize: though few in number, the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* essays which allusively comment on recently published titles can be said to reflect Johnson's interest in the contemporary literary world, and in particular his receptiveness to book reviewing. The following three chapters consider in detail Johnson's actual practices as a book reviewer for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Literary Magazine*, and the *Critical Review*.

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<sup>42</sup> *Yale*, ii. 201-02; The publication of the *Continuation* is noted in the July 1759 issue of the *GM* under its monthly "Books Published" section (xxix. 338); the *Monthly* and *Critical* each reviewed the work in their July issues, which came out during the first week of August (*CR*, viii. 54-64; *MR*, xxi. 21-34).

## Chapter Three

### Johnson's Reviewing in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1742-60)

Johnson may have authored fifty or more book notices in the *Gentleman's* between 1750 and 1769, or so attribution arguments advanced by Donald Greene, Arthur Sherbo, and others would have us believe. John L. Abbott, meanwhile, avers that nearly all of the *Gentleman's Magazine* notices attributed to Johnson are probably the work of John Hawkesworth. In his 1982 biography of Hawkesworth, Abbott sets forth three factors which in his view presumptively tilt the scales away from Johnson's authorship of the contested pieces: Hawkesworth held the literary editorship of the *Gentleman's Magazine* from the late-1740s until the early 1770s, thus leaving him in a much better position to have written the notices attributed to Johnson, who left the *Gentleman's* in 1746 to begin work on the *Dictionary*; the reviews published in the *Gentleman's* between 1747 and 1773 are "marked by an unmistakable unity of approach and language", thus suggesting that they are "the work of a single man"; Hawkesworth was highly adept at imitating Johnson's prose style, which necessarily undermines the attribution of reviews to Johnson based strictly or largely on such evidence.<sup>1</sup>

None of this means that Johnson could not have written at least some of the reviews attributed to him by Greene and the others. By all accounts Johnson ceased

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<sup>1</sup> Abbott, *Hawkesworth*, pp. 86-109; also see Donald Eddy, "John Hawkesworth, Book Reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine*", *Philological Quarterly* xliii (1964), 223-238. A full listing of the reviews attributed to Johnson can be found in the *NCBEL*, columns 1139-40; for the attribution of these pieces see: Donald Greene, "Was Johnson Theatrical Critic of the *Gentleman's Magazine*?", *Review of English Studies* iii (1952), 158-61; Gwin Kolb, "More Attributions to Dr. Johnson", *Studies in English Literature* iii (1962),

writing regularly for the *Gentleman's* once the *Dictionary* got underway, true, but he continued to contribute material to the magazine over the next fifteen years or so, including prefaces to several annual volumes and the reviews referred to in this chapter. The issues of style and critical outlook apply just as easily to Johnson, and it is worth noting that several of the contested reviews are of works that would have held a particular interest for Johnson. Charlotte Lennox's *Life of Harriet Stuart and Shakespeare Illustrated* come to mind, as do Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, Henry Baker's *Employment of the Microscope*, Joseph Robson's *Account of Six Years in Hudson's Bay*, William Shirley's *Black Prince*, and William Toldervey's *Select Epitaphs*.

Complicating matters further is that most of these disputed notices are brief and rather tepid, so attribution arguments that lack conclusive external evidence will inevitably appear undernourished.<sup>2</sup> Abbott has successfully proved that Johnson did not write the reviews of William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753-54), Richard Deane's *Essay on the Future Life of Brute Creatures* (1768), and Owen Ruffhead's *Life of Pope* (1769). But he is right to concede in his 1986 essay, "The Making of the Johnsonian Canon", that the last word on Johnson's contributions to the *Gentleman's Magazine* has yet to be written.<sup>3</sup> A sufficient aura of ambiguity and tentativeness surrounds the debate over Johnson's reviewing in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, it would seem, to warrant further

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77-95; Arthur Sherbo, "Samuel Johnson and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1750-1755", *Johnsonian Studies*, ed. Magdi Wahba (Cairo: Oxford UP, 1962), 133-59.

<sup>2</sup> I had hoped to include here a survey of the reviews attributed to Johnson, but not enough evidence could be assembled to build a solid enough authenticity argument; it seems that the authorship of at least some of these pieces is destined to remain indeterminate.

study. Thus as matters stand now Johnson is known to have published nine reviews in the *Gentleman's Magazine* between 1742 and 1760.<sup>4</sup> Six of the notices are brief and largely unremarkable. The remaining three, however, tell us a great deal about Johnson's outlook on book reviewing and the contemporary state of professional letters.

Published on 2 March 1742, *An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough* attempts to justify Sarah Churchill's controversial actions during her service as a member of Queen Anne's inner circle.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, Churchill's firsthand observations of life at court immediately commanded wide public interest. In keeping with the *Gentleman's* emphasis on contemporary issues Cave asked Johnson, or allowed Johnson, to write a commentary on the memoir for the March 1742 issue.<sup>6</sup> Johnson's analysis begins with a general discussion of historiography, with particular attention given to the proper treatment of primary sources. Autobiographical accounts such as Churchill's are important, Johnson argues, because "those who write in their own

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<sup>3</sup> Abbott, "The Making of the Johnsonian Canon", *Johnson After Two Hundred Years*, ed. Paul Korshin (Philadelphia, PA: Univ. of Penn. Press, 1986), 127-39.

<sup>4</sup> These reviews are listed in Appendix A (also see the *NCBEL*, columns 1137-40). Between 1741-44 Johnson evidently contributed to the *GM's* "Foreign Books" section, a "haphazard" listing of titles which on occasion contained a sentence of commentary. The section "was not evaluative, but enumerative", observes Thomas Kaminski. "It was a compilation rather than a review of foreign books, and its editors had no need of deep insight or critical acumen" (*The Early Career of Samuel Johnson*, p. 147).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough, From Her First Coming to Court, to the Year 1710* (London, 1742): after "my dismissal from queen ANNE'S service", the Duchess states in explaining the genesis of her memoirs, "I perceived how industriously malice was employed, in inventing calumnies to load me with, I drew up an account of my conduct in the several offices I had filled under HER MAJESTY". Sarah Churchill (1660-1744) was renowned for her arrogance, pettiness, and querulousness; the *Account* was actually written by Nathaniel Hooke, who was paid 5,000 pounds sterling for his work (*DNB*, iv. 316-39). For an overview of the publication circumstances and reception of the *Account* see Martin Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 343-45.

<sup>6</sup> For any given month, the *Gentleman's Magazine* normally appeared within the first week of the following month, e.g., the March 1742 number probably was published no later than 7 April 1742: see

Defence, discover often more Impartiality, and less Contempt of Evidence, than the Advocates which Faction or Interest have raised in their Favour". But scholars always must keep in mind that "the Parent of all Memoirs, is the Ambition of being distinguished from the Herd of Mankind, and the Fear of either Infamy or Oblivion". The desire to determine one's standing in history, "cannot but have some Degree of Influence, and which may at least affect the Writers Choice of Facts, though they may not prevail upon him to advance known Falshoods". Hence the historian must be guided by two apparently contradictory but in fact closely related habits of mind: skepticism and a desire to get at the truth. Distrust "is a necessary Qualification of a Student in History", Johnson observes. It "quickens his Discernment of different Degrees of Probability, animates his Search after Evidence, and perhaps heightens his Pleasure at the Discovery of Truth; for Truth", Johnson adds, "though not always obvious, is generally discoverable". Johnson lauds the *Account* for its revelations of the private and public lives of Churchill's contemporaries, though it cannot be recommended as a forthright expose` of "the Character which it is principally intended to preserve or to retrieve". The remainder of the piece comprises even-handed and rather unvarnished commentary on Churchill's depiction of King William, Charles II, and Queen Anne.<sup>7</sup>

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Carlson, *First Magazine*, p. 61 and note 4; the Marlborough essay was published anonymously, though Johnson later claimed it as his: see *Boswell's Life*, i. 19.

<sup>7</sup> *GM*, xii. 128-31.

Clearly, the Marlborough "review" is important for its revelation of Johnson's attitude toward historical method, contemporary politics, and autobiography.<sup>8</sup> But the piece is by its own definition not a review but an "essay" that takes the form of a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine*:

SIR,

THE Account of the Conduct of the Duchess of Marlborough, having been so eagerly received, and so attentively considered, as to become even at this Time of Business, Contests, Wars, and Revolutions, the most popular Topic of Conversation, you may be perhaps willingly admit into your Collection this short Essay upon it, which does not appear written with an Intention to please or offend any Party.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, Johnson here means to examine the significance of Sarah Churchill's well known and much-commented-upon critique of court life rather than to announce the publication of the work itself. That the "essay" contains no publishing or bibliographic data--a common feature of eighteenth-century book reviews--further suggests that the essay should not be categorized as a book review per se, at least not in the same sense as are Johnson's *Literary Magazine* pieces. In fact, the Marlborough "Essay" has far more in common with those *Rambler* essays that obliquely remark on recent, consequential titles--numbers 4, 139, and 154 come to mind, as do *Adventurer* 85 and *Idler* 65--than it does with the four-dozen or so book reviews known to have been written by Johnson, which strive to direct public attention to unknown but evidently worthy books. This is hardly

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson's outlook on historiography is treated fully in John A. Vance, *Samuel Johnson and the Sense of History* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1984); also see Vance, "Johnson's Historical Reviews", *Fresh Reflections on Johnson*, pp. 63-84; Donald Greene, *The Politics of Samuel Johnson* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990), pp. 147.

<sup>9</sup> *GM*, xii. 128; also see *Boswell's Life*, i. 19.



surprising. As a general interest periodical the *Gentleman's Magazine* had no compelling reason to review regularly new books--why devote great amounts of space on material of an as yet unknown value?--and in any case there really was no precedent in 1742 for the kind of reviewing initiated by the *Monthly Review* seven years later. Nevertheless, the rigorous nature of the *Memoirs* essay is relevant here because it exemplifies Johnson's belief in the essential legitimacy of contemporary criticism, particularly in the form of what would eventually become the modern book review. Ten years would pass, however, before Johnson would again publish a substantive commentary on a new work.

Johnson and the aspiring novelist Charlotte Lennox (1720-1804) had been friends for at least two years when Johnson's notice of *The Female Quixote* appeared in the March 1752 issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Apart from writing a favorable notice of the work--the only time he bothered to review a novel--Johnson is known to have contributed the "Dedication" to the *Female Quixote* and possibly the penultimate chapter as well. Johnson also awarded Lennox a rare distinction by quoting from *The Female Quixote* eleven times in the *Dictionary* (there are a total of sixteen quotations from Lennox in the *Dictionary*).<sup>10</sup> Of chief significance here, however, is that the Lennox review is the first of many that represent a personal interest, the extremely partisan notice

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<sup>10</sup> Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 41, 90-92; Chapman and Hazen's supplement to Courtney (included as part of the *Bibliography* published by Oak Knoll Books), p. 136. The *Female Quixote* review is attributed to Johnson by G. B. Hill and, later, by Arthur Sherbo (Courtney, *Bibliography*, p. 38; "Johnson and the *Gentleman's Magazine*", p. 140); the review is listed as authentic in the *NCBEL* (column 1139). Duncan Isles denies the authenticity of the piece, though he gives no reason whatsoever for disagreeing with Hill and Sherbo: see "The Lennox Connection", *Harvard Library Bulletin* xviii (1970), pp. 317-44 (for the authenticity comment see p. 343, note 40). Isles also rejects the claim that Johnson authored the penultimate chapter of the *Female Quixote* (p. 341, note 31), an assertion seconded by Pat Rogers in *The Johnson Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 230.

of the *Female Quixote* being an early example of Johnson's employment of the book review as a means of countering marketplace hostility to worthy authors. The entire critical portion of the review, which follows a two-sentence plot summary, is quoted here:

The solemn manner in which she [Lennox] treats the most common and trivial occurrences, the romantic expectations she forms, and the absurdities which she commits herself, and produces in others, afford a most entertaining series of circumstances and events. Mr. Fielding, however emulous of Cervantes, and jealous of a rival, acknowledges in his paper of the 24th [of March], that in many instances this copy excels the original; and though he has no connection with the author, he concludes his encomium on the work, by earnestly recommending it as a most extraordinary, and most excellent, performance. 'It is, (says he) indeed, a work of true humour, and cannot fail of giving a rational, as well as very pleasing amusement, to a sensible reader, who will at once be instructed and highly diverted'.<sup>11</sup>

The assertive praises here are not all that surprising, perhaps, if we bear in mind Johnson's keen understanding of the scarcity of literary fame as expressed in the *Rambler* and his personal fondness for Charlotte Lennox.<sup>12</sup> What does command interest is Johnson's exaggerated summation of Henry Fielding's commentary, which had appeared a short time earlier in the *Covent-Garden Journal*.

Fielding strives to convey an aura of impartiality in his review even though, as we shall see in moment, he too writes with the intention of stimulating brisk sales of the *Female Quixote*. As the title of the section that carries Fielding's remarks would suggest, "Proceedings at the Court of Censorial Enquiry, & c." mimics the structure of a courtroom hearing. Fielding identifies five points on which Lennox's work surpasses its

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<sup>11</sup> *GM*, xxii. 146.

<sup>12</sup> "It seems not to be sufficiently considered how little renown can be admitted in the world", Johnson declares in *Rambler* 146 (*Yale*, v. 16); also see *Ramblers* 2 and 106.

model, *Don Quixote*, four points on which Cervantes's romance is the better of the two, and areas of comparison where the two works are on equal footing. Fielding's concluding "verdict" is reproduced accurately in the *Gentleman's Magazine* review but clearly Johnson misrepresents matters when he characterizes the rest of the piece as an "encomium". After all, Fielding does admit that the *Female Quixote* cannot compete with its legendary predecessor on the crucial points of originality (Cervantes is "'intitled to the Honour of Invention, which can never be attributed to any Copy however excellent'") and didactic significance (Cervantes "'intended not only the Diversion, but the Instruction and Reformation of his Countrymen: With this Intention he levelled Ridicule at a vicious Folly, which . . . had almost converted a civilized People into a Nation of Cutthroats'"), though these consequential differences are downplayed as much as possible in the *Covent-Garden* piece. We would expect Johnson to acknowledge such foundational distinctions himself--especially given his well-known views on these topics and his high opinion of *Don Quixote*--yet not a word is said about these issues in the *Gentleman's Magazine* review.<sup>13</sup>

Equally striking are Johnson's remarks about Fielding's disinterestedness ("though he has no connection with the author") and his assertion that Lennox's achievement is such that Fielding, who had every reason to fear that his own standing as England's premier novelist was at the stake, was moved to applaud the work anyway ("Mr. Fielding, however emulous of Cervantes, and jealous of a rival"). This is a plainly false account of

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<sup>13</sup> Fielding, *Covent-Garden Journal*, pp. 158-61. For Johnson's opinion of *Don Quixote* see the "Life of

the circumstances surrounding Fielding's essay, as Johnson almost certainly knew when he wrote his review. As J. L. Clifford has pointed out it was Johnson and, later, Johnson's friend Samuel Richardson who managed to persuade an evidently skeptical Andrew Millar to publish the *Female Quixote*. Millar, a friend of Fielding's and a share-holder in the *Covent-Garden Journal*, evidently pressured Fielding, or asked him at least, to "puff" the *Female Quixote* in the *Covent-Garden Journal*--just as Fielding had done earlier for another of Millar's productions, the *History of the Portuguese*. Fielding's review appeared on Tuesday 24 March 1752, two weeks or so before Johnson's and eleven days after the publication of the *Female Quixote*.<sup>14</sup> What follows is a bit of guess-work, but given the connection between Johnson and Millar (a financial sponsor of the *Dictionary*) and Millar and Fielding--not to mention Johnson's legendary willingness to act on behalf of literary friends, most especially Charlotte Lennox--one wonders if Johnson encouraged Millar to seek an endorsement from Fielding. Whatever the case, both Fielding and Johnson make a point of hiding their advocacy aims behind a veneer of impartiality. Indeed, Johnson's review is a particularly shrewd piece of work. He recasts--to the point of misrepresentation--the opinion of the most popular novelist of the day and transplants it from a fledgling twice-weekly to a well-respected journal with a nation-wide

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Butler" (*Lives*, i. 209).

<sup>14</sup> *Covent-Garden Journal*, pp. xxix-xxx, and note 2; also see pp. 158-59, note 3; Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 90-92. For the publication date of the *GM* see Carlson, *First Magazine*, p. 61 and note 4; for a detailed discussion of Johnson's and Richardson's involvement in the composition, revision, and printing of the *Female Quixote* see Duncan Isles, "The Lennox Collection".

circulation.<sup>15</sup> Why Johnson chose to approach the *Female Quixote* review in the manner that he did is open to speculation. One credible explanation is that Johnson, aware of the overcrowding of the prose fiction market yet loath to make assertive pronouncements that might turn out to be reckless or foolish, saw the use of the Fielding excerpt as an acceptable compromise. Lennox's novel is given a crucial boost in publicity without Johnson himself having to say things he did not really believe, though his excessively sanguine interpretation of Fielding's review must have stretched to the limit his highly refined sense of scholarly manners.

The *Female Quixote* was reviewed in the April 1752 issue of the *Monthly Review*, a month or so after Johnson's notice appeared. John Ward's twelve-page review is entirely given over to extract and summary, apart from an introductory remark establishing the *Monthly's* neutrality. "Whether a plan, and character, of this kind, be agreeable to nature, or to the age and the country we live in", Ward declares after summarizing the basic plot of the novel, "our readers will determine for themselves".<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, appended to Ward's review is a provocative bit of criticism written by Ralph Griffiths, the editor of the *Monthly*:

N.B. We have been the more liberal of our extracts from this work, that our readers might be the better enabled to judge of the character given of it by the author of *The Covent Garden Journal*; who has not scrupled to prefer this performance, in many respects, to the inimitable *Don Quixote*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The first issue of the *Covent-Garden Journal* appeared on 4 January 1752 (*Journal*, p. xxvii); for commentary on its evidently modest circulation see *British Literary Magazines*, p. 66 and *Covent-Garden Journal*, pp. xlv-xlvi.

<sup>16</sup> *MR*, vi. 250.

<sup>17</sup> *MR*, vi. 262.

One wonders whether Griffiths here is referring to the *Covent Garden Journal* essay itself or to Johnson's précis of Fielding in the *Gentleman's*. Whatever the case, Griffiths clearly believes that Fielding over-estimated Lennox's achievement and that the generous extracts published in the *Monthly* would set matters right.

In October 1760 Johnson would publish the last of his major reviews for the *Gentleman's Magazine*.<sup>18</sup> Though Johnson does not go to quite the same lengths for William Tytler as he had done for Charlotte Lennox eight years earlier, the review of *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Evidence produced against Mary Queen of Scots* is remarkable, nonetheless, for the balance Johnson strikes between encouraging a sympathetic reading of the work and refraining from authoritative pronouncements.

William Tytler's *Historical and Critical Enquiry* is entitled to a place in history distinct from its association with Samuel Johnson's *Gentleman's Magazine* review. Tytler's attempt to clear Mary's name from accusations of murder and adultery appeared in 1760, six years after an Edinburgh librarian, Walter Goodall, had argued in the *Examination of the Letters said to be written by Mary, Queen of Scots*, that the letters between Mary and the Earl of Bothwell, which supposedly proved that the two were involved in an adulterous relationship and had conspired to kill Mary's husband, Lord Darnley, were in fact forgeries. "To Goodall's mind", writes Jayne Elizabeth Lewis in her essay, "Mary Stuart's 'Fatal Box': Sentimental History and the Revival of the Casket Letters Controversy", "local anachronisms, catechreses, inconsistencies with other

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<sup>18</sup> Johnson acknowledged the authorship of this review (*Boswell's Life*, i. 21).

documents and with Mary's own known literary style all proved the casket letters spurious".<sup>19</sup> Lewis observes that the controversy surrounding the "casket letters" (called so because, allegedly, the letters were held in a silver casket when they were taken from Bothwell) had been a matter of enduring interest in the literary world, and in Johnson's day the issues surrounding the accusations against Mary proved to be heavily freighted with contemporary political and cultural significance. The casket letters "were not very subtly used to justify the Hanoverian succession", Lewis states. "In turn, to discredit the letters would be to sympathize with the Stuart cause".<sup>20</sup> Of equal significance is that the casket letters "became for Johnson's history-writing contemporaries at once an object of close scrutiny and a lively trope for the predicaments of modern British historiography, formal and informal alike".<sup>21</sup>

Far more than her cousin Elizabeth, Mary exemplified the persisting problem that sixteenth-century matter posed for eighteenth-century method. Elizabeth may have masterminded many of the machinations that made sixteenth-century evidences so unreliable. But it was Mary, evidently knowable only through others' false but deeply felt constructions, who tried modern historiography to its limit. The intrinsic mystery of her personal 'character' sorely tested the assumption that written characters were trustworthy transmitters of historical information.<sup>22</sup>

Lewis goes on to observe that, "Ultimately, the casket letters controversy enlisted everyone from literary celebrities like Hume, Johnson, and Robertson to anonymous

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<sup>19</sup> Jayne Elizabeth Lewis, "Mary Stuart's 'Fatal Box': Sentimental History and the Revival of the Casket Letters Controversy", *Age of Johnson*, vii. 427-73.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, "Mary Stuart", p. 446.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, "Mary Stuart", p. 429.

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, "Mary Stuart", p. 435.

reviewers, mildly delusional antiquarians, and brilliant and meticulous French women writing in the twilight of the *ancien régime*".<sup>23</sup>

How Johnson came to write the review of William Tytler's book remains a mystery. His day-to-day involvement with the *Gentleman's Magazine* had ceased many years earlier, and his departure from the *Literary Magazine* in 1757 by all accounts marked the end of his brief career as a regular reviewer. Equally open to question is whether or not Johnson even knew Tytler (1711-92) personally at this time, though it is established that they met during Johnson's visit to the Hebrides in 1773. Thomas Tyers, one of Johnson's early biographers, suggests that Johnson wrote the review "at the instigation of an old acquaintance". E. A. Bloom makes a similar claim, asserting that the review was "probably a voluntary contribution motivated by personal conviction or prejudice", perhaps related in some way to Johnson's "Stuart sympathies". An arresting surmise, certainly, especially if we take into account Johnson's particularly strong admiration for Mary Queen of Scots: "'who could let your Queen remain twenty years in captivity, and then be put to death, without even a pretence of justice, without your ever attempting to rescue her'", Johnson remarked to Boswell at one point during the Hebrides tour, "'and such a Queen too! as every man of any gallantry of spirit would have sacrificed his life for'". Believing that Bloom overstates the Jacobite angle, John A. Vance argues that the Tytler piece chiefly intends "to make significant points about historical writing and evidence", and "to champion the spirit of independence that marks

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<sup>23</sup> Lewis, "Mary Stuart", p. 448.



the best kind of historian".<sup>24</sup> Johnson's commentary speaks to all of these issues at some level, certainly, but we should not overlook the considerable extent to which the review is shaped by aspects of the contemporary literary marketplace. To begin with, the Tytler piece is first and foremost a book review that seeks to win a sympathetic reception for a presumptively unpopular work written by an evidently meritorious but unknown author. Also influencing Johnson's analysis are the faintly condescending reviews published earlier in the *Monthly Review* (July 1760) *Critical Review* (June 1760), and *British Magazine* (June 1760).<sup>25</sup> As a means of helping Tytler triumph over these hazards Johnson focuses on Tytler's benevolent intentions and scholarly fastidiousness while at the same time avoiding the telltale dogmatical overreaching regularly found in the leading review journals, the final judgment of the work in Johnson's view being the proper responsibility of readers.

The review itself comprises about eight columns (four pages). Summaries, extracts, and connective remarks constitute all but the first few and final paragraphs of the

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<sup>24</sup> DNB, xix. 1382; *Boswell's Life*, v. 40, 387-96; *The Early Biographies of Samuel Johnson*, ed. O M Brack and R. E. Kelly (Iowa City, IA: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1974), p. 88; Bloom, *Grub Street*, p. 183; Vance, "Historical Reviews", p. 76. For a thorough exploration of Johnson and Jacobitism see J. C. D. Clark, *Samuel Johnson: Literature, religion, and English cultural politics from the Restoration to Romanticism* (Cambridge, 1994); Greene, *Politics*, xxix-xlii; also see *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Journal*, ed. Paul Korshin (New York: AMS Press, 1990-), vols. 7 and 8. These volumes feature an exchange of essays between Clark, Greene, Thomas Curley, and Howard Weinbrot on Johnson and Jacobitism. A more recent treatment is by Robert Folkenflik, "Johnson's Politics", *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*, ed. Greg Clingham (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 102-13. "The notion of Johnson as Jacobite depends upon teasing out evidence for a treasonous and therefore secret commitment that carried the threat of hanging, but it founders on clear-cut positions", Folkenflik asserts. Johnson "was neither a supporter of the Catholic James II and the restoration of Stuart rule, nor a believer in the divine right of kings. And he knew too much about the history of England to take James as having an indefeasible right to the throne" (p. 103).

<sup>25</sup> For a brief discussion of Johnson's involvement with the *British Magazine* see Yale, x. 279; also see Basker, *Smollett*, p. 193.

review. Though proportionally meager Johnson's critical commentary is carefully calibrated to soften the hostile disposition of the public towards Tytler's historical revisionism. In the following passage, readers are called upon to admire Tytler's courageous effort to correct firmly entrenched but deeply flawed popular opinions about Mary Queen of Scots:

The writers of the present time . . . profess to serve no interest, and speak with loud contempt of sycophants and slaves. There is, however, a power from whose influence neither they nor their predecessors have ever been free. Those who have set greatness at defiance have yet been the slaves of fashion. When an opinion has once become popular, very few are willing to oppose it. Idleness is more willing to credit than enquire; cowardice is afraid of controversy, and vanity of answer; and he that writes merely for sale is tempted to court purchasers by flattering the prejudices of the publick. . . . Yet there remains still among us, not wholly extinguished, a zeal for truth, a desire of establishing right, in opposition to fashion.<sup>26</sup>

In his preface Tytler states that he intends chiefly "to convince any of the unprejudiced part of his readers" that history has unjustly branded Mary a murderer.<sup>27</sup> Given the popular state of mind regarding Mary and her descendants--"It has now been fashionable for near half a century to defame and vilify the house of *Stuart*"--Johnson knows that the disinterested readers whom Tytler hopes to reach will be extremely hard to come by. Hence the aim of the review is to encourage the public to approach Tytler's book with an open mind and, collaterally, to weaken the existing popular prejudices against Tytler's thesis that had recently found expression in the lead review journals. Indeed, it is possible that Johnson in the passage quoted alludes to the earlier reviews published in the

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<sup>26</sup> *GM*, xxx. 453.

<sup>27</sup> William Tytler, *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Evidence produced by the Earls of Murray and Morton, against Mary Queen of Scots* (Edinburgh, 1760), p. viii.

*Monthly* and *Critical*--and perhaps in the *British Magazine* as well--all three of which offer grudging approval of Tytler's historical method but ultimately reject his thesis.

Writing in the *Monthly* three months before the publication of Johnson's *Gentleman's Magazine* review, Owen Ruffhead insists that Tytler "has not been able to establish the innocence" of Mary even though it now appears that the evidence against her is not as conclusive as once thought. Ruffhead cites the "indecent" of Mary's "hasty marriage with Bothwell, who was publicly accused of having murdered her husband" as reason enough to reject a complete re-thinking of Mary's historical standing. The reviewer for the *Critical* reached basically the same conclusion in the preceding month, as he asserts that Tytler "has in general acquitted himself with great ability and address; he has invalidated the evidence against Mary" but her innocence has not been "fully established". We find a remarkably clear echo of the *Critical* commentary in the June issue of Smollett's *British Magazine*. Interestingly, the *British Magazine* and *Critical* notices appeared in the same month, thus raising the distinct possibility that Smollett authored both pieces.<sup>28</sup> Here is the *British Magazine* review in its entirety:

This champion, for the character of an injured and accomplished Lady, which for two centuries had been cruelly traduced, enters the lists with great intrepidity, against two of the most formidable antagonists whom the age could produce [Hume and Robertson]; and manages his weapons with such dexterity, that if he does not clearly demonstrate the innocence of Mary, he at least establishes very strong presumptions in her favour, which must warmly recommend her cause to the protection of the candid and humane.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *MR*, xxiii. 40; *CR*, ix. 432. For a brief discussion of the review section of the *British Magazine* and its relation to the *Critical* see Basker, *Smollett*, pp. 193-98.

<sup>29</sup> *British Magazine*, i. 378.

All three reviewers, then, basically agree that Tytler's considerable talents are placed in the service of an essentially untenable cause. The reviewers are impressed with Tytler's scholarly thoroughness and impartiality, but they cannot bring themselves to endorse what they obviously take to be politically unacceptable conclusions. Even the *British Magazine* piece--easily the most appreciative of the three--carries a whiff of condescension insofar as the reviewer concludes that Mary's case will be heard sympathetically only by the most charitable and benevolent of readers. We are meant to feel sorry for Mary, certainly, but the *British Magazine* reviewer would also have us believe that Tytler is to be pitied as well given the weight of scholarly and popular opinion against him--not to mention his apparent failure to "clearly demonstrate the innocence of Mary". The review conveys a vague sympathy for his subject, in other words, even while it denies the essential validity of Tytler's argument. Johnson almost certainly speaks to this circumstance when he dwells upon Tytler's scholarly discernment and courageousness, such traits in his view being far more reliable indicators of truth than mere unexamined opinion and politically motivated prejudice. We are called to trust and admire Tytler, that is, and not to see him as an idealist whose observations are doomed to go unheeded.

Other aspects of the review suggest an attempt by Johnson to counter notices published in the *Monthly* and the *Critical*. Both journals make a point of rejecting the most ambitious of Tytler's arguments, which is that Mary's accusers, the earls of Murray and Morton, were chiefly responsible for the murder of her husband Lord Darnley. Tytler

"had done much better to have stopped at his vindication of Mary", writes Ruffhead, "after he had so ably invalidated the presumptive evidence against her, it was injudicious to build a charge against her accusers, on presumptions equally weak". The reviewer for the *Critical* also claims that Tytler has "brought strong presumptions against Murray and Morton, but he has not convicted them".<sup>30</sup> Johnson allusively disputes these arguments in the final paragraph of his *Gentleman's Magazine* piece when he declares that Tytler's *Enquiry* successfully shifts the burden of proof to those who would assert the innocence of Murray and Morton:

The rest of this treatise is employed in an endeavour to prove that *Mary's* accusers were the murderers of *Darnley*; thro' this enquiry it is not necessary to follow him, only let it be observed, that, if these letters were forged by them, they may easily be thought capable of other crimes. That the letters were forged is now made so probable, that perhaps they will never more be cited as testimonies.<sup>31</sup>

Though nothing has been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt, Johnson admits here, the weight of the evidence clearly resides with Tytler. In effect, what Johnson does here and throughout the review is to pit reason against prejudice. Tytler's work embodies the modern scholarly method; the popular view of Mary as expressed in the review journals, meanwhile, represents unexamined opinion and political prejudice.

That the review chiefly aims to clear away unreasonable hostility toward Tytler's thesis is evident enough, but what is Johnson's opinion of the work itself? In keeping with his normal reviewing practice Johnson is reticent about endorsing Tytler's

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<sup>30</sup> *MR*, xxiii. 39; *CR*, ix. 432.

<sup>31</sup> *GM*, xxx. 456.

conclusions even though he amply praises Tytler's intellectual courage and scholarly thoroughness: Tytler "has attempted a vindication of *Mary*"; he has "undertaken to prove" that the incriminating correspondences are "spurious"; "That the letters were forged", Johnson says in the final sentence, "is now made so probable, that perhaps they will never more be cited as testimonies".<sup>32</sup> Johnson thus insists on honoring the line between persuasiveness and irrefutable fact. As something of a skeptic Johnson realizes that additional evidence may surface to modify Tytler's conclusions, though Tytler's devotion to truth cannot be disputed. At once ambitious--especially in light of prevailing opinion and Tytler's lack of reputation--and yet typically restrained in its evaluative commentary, Johnson's review works to encourage a fair-minded reception of Tytler's *Historical and Critical Enquiry*.

In conclusion, any attempt to assess Johnson's achievement as a reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* must remain provisional, if only because a study that authoritatively disposes of the authenticity controversies surrounding the four-dozen or so reviews attributed to Johnson has yet to be completed. Nevertheless, the two reviews discussed in this chapter--the Marlborough "review" is in fact an "Essay", though clearly it reflects Johnson's willingness to offer intellectually rigorous commentary on recently published titles--remain significant critical essays in their own right. What the *Female Quixote* and *Mary Queen of Scots* reviews illustrate in particular is Johnson's artful ability to reconcile his desire to help worthy authors triumph over the hazards of the

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<sup>32</sup> *GM*, xxx. 456-58.

contemporary book trade with his temperamental reluctance to make dogmatical pronouncements on the works of living writers.

## Chapter Four

### Johnson's Reviewing in the *Literary Magazine* (1756-57)

#### Introduction

In the spring of 1755--at some point before the publication of the *Dictionary*, and at roughly the moment when the number of reviews in the *Gentleman's Magazine* attributed to him sharply declines--Johnson began investigating the possibility of establishing a review journal devoted to serious works of scholarship. The following entry appears in his diary for March/early April 1755:

*The Annals of Literature, foreign as well as domestick. Imitate Le Clerc--Bayle--Barbeyrac. Infelicity of Journals in England. Works of the Learned. We cannot take in all. Sometimes copy from foreign Journalists. Always tell.*<sup>1</sup>

Johnson, it seems, hoped to start a review journal that would cater for the tastes of scholars and the academically minded among the leisured classes. The plan sketched out here would surface again in a letter to Thomas Warton, written at about the time of the diary entry (25 March 1755). "I intend in the winter to open a Bibliotheque, and remember that you have subscribed a Sheet a year", Johnson declares, "let us try likewise if we cannot persuade your Brother [Joseph] to subscribe another".<sup>2</sup> The scholarly periodical envisioned here never materialized, of course, but these private statements suggest strongly that Johnson looked upon regular reviewing not merely as a means of

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<sup>1</sup> *Yale*, i. 56; *Boswell's Life*, i. 284-85, and note; the learned journals referred to here are Jean Le Clerc's *Bibliotheque Universelle et Historique* (1686-93); Pierre Bayle's *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres* (1684-87); Jean Barbeyrac's *Bibliotheque raisonnée des Ouvrages des Scavans* (1728-53); see Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 165-67.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters*, i. 101.



earning a living when no congenial literary work was available, as some Johnson scholars have claimed, but as a consequential and dignified critical occupation.<sup>3</sup>

Also worth noting about the diary entry is Johnson's remark on the "Infelicity" of contemporary review journals. The *Dictionary* tersely defines "Infelicity" as "Unhappiness; misery; calamity", which would lead us to conclude that the present state of book reviewing in Johnson's opinion was not merely imperfect or flawed but positively wretched. Should we read Johnson's remarks on this point as conveying a contempt for the practices of the *Monthly Review* and the handful of less successful imitators? Or does Johnson here mean to say that important works of scholarship are regularly crowded out of the marketplace, thanks to the sheer volume of less worthy material and the current absence of a journal devoted to reviewing scholarly titles? Most probable is that both these ideas are in play. Whatever is specifically meant here, at some point within the next twelve months Johnson accepted the editorship of the *Literary Magazine*, the only time in his career when he would regularly write book reviews.

It must be said at the outset that the *Literary Magazine* was not designed to compete directly with the *Monthly Review* or its chief rival the *Critical Review*. In matters of form, the *Literary Magazine* is best thought of as an imitator of the *Gentleman's Magazine*--both periodicals averaged about fifty-five octavo pages per monthly issue--and in terms of content, as a journal of opinion that persistently and at times obstreperously opposed the war with France (i.e., the Seven Years' War, 1756-63).

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<sup>3</sup> Bloom, *Grub Street*, p. 177; O M Brack and Gae Holladay, "Johnson as Patron", *Greene Centennial*

The review section of the *Literary Magazine* varied in size from issue to issue, and was superintended by Johnson from May 1756 until July 1757. Johnson wrote the lion's share of the journal's reviews during this period, along with what would prove to be the *Literary Magazine's* most controversial editorial pieces such as the "Introduction to the Political State of Great-Britain" and the "Observations on the Present State of Affairs, 1756". Indeed, Johnson's frequent criticisms of England's war effort almost certainly inhibited sales of the journal and, perhaps, hastened his departure. It seems that future Vinerian Professor of Law Robert Chambers, who was at the time an Oxford undergraduate, and Griffith Jones, who would eventually serve as editor of the *London Chronicle* and the *Public Ledger*, contributed material to the *Literary Magazine*, as did *Gray's-Inn Journal* author and playwright Arthur Murphy. Such an array of talent failed to command much public interest, however. The circulation of the *Literary Magazine* probably hovered around 500 per issue, or less than one-fourth that of the *Monthly Review*. The *Literary Magazine* folded in July 1758, after the publication of its twenty-seventh number.<sup>4</sup>

The seriousness and intelligence that Johnson would bring to his only stint as a regular reviewer is foreshadowed in his essay, "To the Public", which prefaced the

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*Studies: Essays Presented to Donald Greene in the Centennial Year of the University of Southern California*, ed. Paul Korshin (Charlottesville, VA: Virginia UP, 1984), 178-99. "Johnson as Patron".

<sup>4</sup> Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 165-87; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 2-15; *British Literary Magazines*, pp. 198-200. Johnson's political essays in the *Literary Magazine* are fully considered in Greene, *Politics*, pp. 154-73; also see the tenth volume of the *Yale* edition, which reprints the two essays noted here and other similar works. In a letter to Charlotte Lennox (30 July 1756) Johnson remarks that the *LM's* circulation was one-seventh that of the *GM's*; during 1746 an average of 3,000 copies of the *GM* were printed each month; by 1797 that figure had risen to 4,550: see *Letters*, i. 137; *British Literary Magazines*, p. 138; Forster, *Book Reviews: 1775-1800*, p. xxxiii, and note 51.

*Literary Magazine's* inaugural issue. "The literary History necessarily contains an account of the Labours of the Learned, in which whether we shall shew much judgment or sagacity, must be left to our Readers to determine", Johnson states as he sets forth the journal's reviewing policy:

we can promise only justness and candour. It is not to be expected that we can insert extensive extracts or critical Examinations of all the writings which this age of writers may offer to our notice. A few only will deserve the distinction of criticism, and a few only will obtain it. We shall try to select the best and most important pieces, and are not without hope, that we may sometimes influence the public voice, and hasten the popularity of a valuable Work.<sup>5</sup>

To appreciate fully the significance of these remarks one must be familiar not only with the practices of the two major review journals at the time but also with Johnson's understanding of the contemporary literary landscape as expressed in his essay serials and occasional journalistic commentary. By characterizing his reviewing as an account of "the Labours of the Learned", for instance, Johnson essentially pledges to focus attention on aspiring writers who have met the traditional prerequisites of authorship spelled out in *Rambler* 154 and *Adventurer* 115. That comparatively few authors will receive the "distinction of criticism", meanwhile, is a way of conferring justified neglect on the multitude of worthless productions turned out by the legions of inept dabblers, hacks, and novices discussed in the "Reflections on the present state of literature", *Rambler* 16, *Idler* 2, and elsewhere. Such a policy also spares Johnson the necessity of writing captious reviews which, as his prefatory essay to the *London Chronicle* make clear, did so much to

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<sup>5</sup> "To the Public" (*LM*, i. iv).

demean the worthy estate of criticism.<sup>6</sup> The explicit intention to "influence the public voice, and hasten the popularity of a valuable Work" addresses the difficulties worthy authors face in gaining a fair hearing from the public, points explored fully in *Ramblers* 1, 2, and 146. A favorable review would encourage the sale of a meritorious book that might otherwise go unnoticed in the sea of new works flowing from the popular presses, or perhaps rescue a deserving work from an incompetent review. Indeed, Johnson here can be said to look upon reviewing as the literary marketplace's answer to traditional forms of literary patronage. We can interpret his reviewing policy in the *Literary Magazine*, in other words, as an extension of the attitude toward patronage and the marketplace expressed in the *Rambler* and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

Also worth noting about the *Literary Magazine* prefatory essay is its conformity to Johnson's well-known views on the primacy of popular judgment.<sup>8</sup> In the prefatory essay Johnson pledges to set forth, to the extent that time and space allow, works that have met basic scholarly and aesthetic standards. It is then up to the public to adjudicate between the competing but essentially legitimate claims to literary honors made by the authors at hand. Of equal importance is Johnson's promise to screen out patently

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<sup>6</sup> "That Part of our Work by which it is distinguished from all others, is the *Literary Journal*, or Account of the Labours of the *Learned*", writes Johnson in the *London Chronicle*'s "Preliminary Discourse". "This was, for a long Time, among the Deficiencies of English Literature, but as the Caprice of Man is always starting from too little to too much, we have now, amongst other Disturbers of human Quiet, a numerous body of *Reviewers* and *Remarkers*" (*London Chronicle*, i. 1; Johnson makes essentially makes the same point in the "Reflections on the present state of literature" *UV*, p. 164).

<sup>7</sup> Also see Brack and Holladay, "Johnson as Patron".

<sup>8</sup> For fuller discussion of Johnson and popular judgment see Clarence Tracy, "Johnson and the Common Reader", *Dalhousie Review* lvii (1977-78), 405-23; W. R. Keast, "The Theoretical Foundations of Johnson's Criticism", *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern* ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago, 1952), pp. 389-407; Alvin Kernan, *Printing Technology, Samuel Johnson, and Letters* (Princeton, 1987), pp. 229-32.

unsuitable works--the very kinds of books, as he points out in *Idler* 85, that "distract choice without supplying any real want"--so that readers can choose from among worthwhile books works rather than a bewildering array of deceptive advertisements and bombastic titles churned out by the book trade.<sup>9</sup>

How does Johnson's practice as a reviewer compare to the ambitious aims suggested by the *Literary Magazine's* prefatory essay? In one sense, Johnson's choice of books for review during his fourteen-month tenure as literary editor is quite conventional. Almost all of the works reviewed by Johnson are also given notice in the *Monthly Review*, the *Critical Review*, or both. Many of the titles were reviewed first by the *Monthly* or *Critical*, thus suggesting the possibility that Johnson routinely consulted these journals before deciding on what to review.<sup>10</sup> Of the thirty-nine titles reviewed by Johnson in the *Literary Magazine* (the three commentaries on Hanway's *Journal* are here counted as one), twenty were reviewed first by either the *Monthly* or the *Critical*. Johnson reviews four titles--Murphy's *Gray's-Inn Journal*; Robert Keith's *Catalogue of Scottish Bishops*; and the political periodicals the *Test* and the *Con-test*--that are not reviewed in either of the two leading review journals.

Significantly, Johnson does indeed fulfill his prefatory promise to concentrate on the "Labours of the Learned". No "familiar histories" are reviewed, nor is notice given to the other sorts of trifling material--banal memoirs and conduct books; doggerel poetry;

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<sup>9</sup> *Yale*, ii. 265.

<sup>10</sup> At the time of his death Johnson owned numerous issues of the *Monthly* and *Critical*: see Donald Greene, *Samuel Johnson's Library: An Annotated Guide* (Victoria, B.C.: Univ. of Victoria, 1975), pp. 51, 85.

inane polemics--frequently listed in the catch-all "Monthly Catalogue" sections of the two leading review journals and alluded to in *Adventurer* 115 and the "Reflections on the present state of literature". Of the thirty-three writers whose works are reviewed by Johnson in the *Literary Magazine*, twenty-nine are either professional writers in one form or another--i.e., journalists, playwrights, poets (the authors included in Harrison's miscellany, Soame Jenyns, Charlotte Lennox, David Mallet, Arthur Murphy, Owen Ruffhead, John Shebbeare, Paul Whitehead, William Whitehead)--or members in good standing of the learned professions, that is, medicine (Patrick Browne, Alexander Russell, Charles Lucas); the clergy (John Douglas, James Hampton, Robert Keith, Richard Lovett, Charles Parkin, Stephen White); the professoriate, e.g., university fellows, antiquarians, and members of the Royal Society (Thomas Birch, William Borlase, Archibald Bower, Thomas Blackwell, Stephen Hales, Hoadly and Wilson, Francis Home, Johann Keysler, Joseph Warton, the compiler of the *Philosophical Transactions*).<sup>11</sup> Students of eighteenth century literature nowadays would have little trouble recognizing a handful of these names--Lennox, Mallet, Murphy, Newton, Warton, perhaps William Whitehead (appointed poet laureate in 1757)--but it is important to note that most of the other authors also enjoyed a measure of fame or at least social prominence in their day, however obscure they may seem to the twentieth century reader. What we have here, in other words, is "Dictionary" Johnson remarking on the works of similarly well known contemporaries (or in the case of Thomas Browne and Newton, significant historical

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<sup>11</sup> Biographical information on the authors reviewed by Johnson is taken from the *DNB*; the anonymous

figures). The remaining four authors reviewed by Johnson--Samuel Bever (military officer), Bouchier Cleeve (an industrialist writing on national finance), Lewis Evans (surveyor and cartographer), and Jonas Hanway (philanthropist)--can be characterized as occasional or avocational authors whose demonstrable expertise in non-literary fields entitles them to be taken seriously.

Also remarkable about Johnson's choice of books for review is that so many--about two-thirds of the total--represent the less ambitious or humbler sorts of literary activity: compilations of one kind or another and translations of well known material (five); practical science books (twelve); journalistic pamphlets and periodicals (twelve). The emphasis on such material can be explained largely by Johnson's underlying belief that all literature should promote individual or social welfare--particularly in regard to compilations, translations, and journalistic/current events commentary, which in Johnson's view could offer England's increasingly diverse reading public a convenient and relatively inexpensive source for worthwhile knowledge and harmless amusement.<sup>12</sup> Innovations in the practical arts and manufacturing are similarly beneficial in Johnson's view, as *Ramblers* 9, 83, and 137 make clear.<sup>13</sup>

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author of *A Letter relative to the Case of Admiral Byng* is not counted in the calculations here; nor are Sir Thomas Browne (d. 1682) and Isaac Newton (d. 1727).

<sup>12</sup> For the importance of compilations see, for instance, Johnson's defense of the *GM's* abridgment of *Trapp's Sermons* (*GM*, lvii. 555-58), *Rambler* 145 (*Yale*, v. 11-12), *Adventurer* 137 (*Yale*, ii. 491-92), and *Idler* 85 (*Yale* ii, 265); for translations see *Idlers* 68 and 69 (*Yale*, ii. 211-17); for Johnson's attitude toward pamphleteering see the "Introduction" to the *Harleian Miscellany* (Hazen, *Prefaces and Dedications*, pp. 54-59).

<sup>13</sup> *Yale*, iii. 49-50; iv. 73, 361. For a fuller consideration of Johnson's outlook on manufacturing and the practical arts see John H. Middelndorf, "Johnson on Wealth and Commerce", *Johnson, Boswell, and Their Circle* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 47-64; also see R. B. Schwartz, *Samuel Johnson and the New Science* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1971). Johnson was for many years a dues-paying member of the Society

Johnson's reluctance to review works of theology or speculative philosophy-- Soame Jenyns's *Free Inquiry* and Isaac Newton's *Four Letters to Bentley* are the notable exceptions, though the *Bentley* piece is surprisingly tepid--may be a reflection of what Pat Rogers characterizes as Johnson's "sceptical and even dry intellect", that is, his evident indifference to broad, abstract issues that bear little obvious relation to everyday human experience. It is also possible that Johnson's religious sensibility--the nagging self-doubt about his moral fitness; his fear of dissolution after death--made such topics particularly uncongenial for extended analysis. "The Christian religion was with him such a certain and established truth", Joshua Reynolds observes in his biographical account of Johnson, "that he considered it as a kind of profanation to hold any argument about its truth". Certainly there was no shortage of theological and philosophical books available for review. The March and April 1756 issues of the *Monthly*, which appeared just before the inaugural issue of the *Literary Magazine*, give us a rough idea of the sorts of material being produced by English presses. The "Main Articles" section of the March issue, for instance, features reviews of Richard Parry's *The Scripture-Account of the Lord's Supper*, Thomas Sharp's *Three Discourses on Mr. Hutchinson's Exposition of Cherubim*, and J. Strong's *Observations on Important Points of Faith*. The "Monthly Catalogue" section, meanwhile, gives notice to: *A Vindication of the Quakers*; *Deism Refuted*; *The Case of the Jews Considered*; *The Wonderful Signs of Christ's Second Coming*; *A Dissertation*

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for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce: see J. L. Abbott, "Dr. Johnson and the Society", *The Virtuoso Tribe of Arts & Sciences: Studies in the Eighteenth-Century Work and Membership of the London Society of Arts*, ed. D. G. C. Allan and J. L. Abbott (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1992), pp. 7-17; also see Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 226-28; *Boswell's Life*, ii. 139-40, note 1.



*Proving the Light of the Gospel is the Light of Nature; A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law.*

The April number carries reviews of *A New Method of demonstrating from Reason and Philosophy, the four fundamental Points of Religion* and *The Folly and Danger of Enthusiasm: or, The wickedness of attempting to know the secret councils of God*. A fair number of published sermons is given notice in these two issues as well.<sup>14</sup> Any of the titles noted here would have served as a fit subject for review, yet Johnson chose to ignore these and countless other similar works.

The near-complete absence of prose fiction in Johnson's choice of books for review--the one exception being Elizabeth Harrison's *Miscellanies*, which he subscribed to--is easier to pin down. As *Rambler* 4 makes clear, Johnson held a low opinion of the contemporary run of realistic novels even though he acknowledged the theoretical worthiness of the genre itself.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, when Johnson assumed the editorship of the *Literary Magazine* he not only refused to review novels himself, but he evidently kept his staff from reviewing them as well. True, four or five novels are listed in the *Literary Magazine's* "Books Published" section under "Entertainment"; but none are given substantive notice during Johnson's tenure. What makes this policy significant is

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<sup>14</sup> Pat Rogers, *Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1993), p. 6; *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ii. 225; M. J. Quinlan, *Samuel Johnson: A Layman's Religion* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964), passim; *MR*, xiv. 253-56, 273, 367; for the popularity of religious and philosophical works in Johnson's day see Thomas R. Preston, "Biblical Criticism, Literature, and the Eighteenth-Century Reader", *Books and Their Readers*, pp. 97-126; John Valdimir Price, "The Reading of Philosophical Literature", *Books and Their Readers*, pp. 165-96.

<sup>15</sup> Also see Johnson's prefatory note to Charlotte Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1753): "Of all the novels and romances that wit or idleness, vanity or indigence, have pushed into the world", Johnson observes, "there are few, of which the end cannot be conjectured from the beginning; or where the authors have done more, than to transpose the incidents of other tales, or strip the circumstances from one event for the decoration of another" (Yale, vii. 48; also see *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, i. 290).

that marketplace demand for novels rose sharply during the mid-1750s, and the appearance of new titles spiked upward from roughly thirty-two in 1754 to more than fifty in 1756. In "one form or another the novel was the most popular genre of the period, reaching the widest audience", writes W. A. Speck in *Society and Literature in England 1700-1760*. "It transcended the barriers between the gentle reader and the middling sort, and even made contact with some of the masses".<sup>16</sup> Evidence of the novel's popularity--and its dubious status in the eyes of opinion-makers--at the moment when Johnson superintended the *Literary Magazine* can be found in book reviews of the period. "The season for novels is now set in", writes the reviewer of the *History of Lavinia Rawlins* (*Monthly*: November 1755), "and the press is likely to produce a plenteous harvest; but, if those that shall hereafter be brought to the market, prove no better than the first crop, we shall have no great appetite for more of 'em". Similar observations are made in the review of the *Adventures of Jack Smart* (*Monthly*: April 1756). "It is amazing, that notwithstanding the vast knowledge of human nature, strength of genius, fecundity of wit, and happiness of expression, which are required in a novel-writer, so many vile romances should, almost daily, crawl from the press".<sup>17</sup> In their unsparing criticisms of badly written novels, the reviews in the *Monthly* and, later, in the *Critical*, can be said to share common ground with the pronouncements on prose fiction in *Rambler* 4. Yet it is important to note that novels are regularly awarded the status of a review nonetheless, if

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<sup>16</sup> Speck, *Society and Literature* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1983), p. 198; James Raven, *British Fiction 1750-1770: A Chronological Check-List of Prose Fiction Printed in Britain and Ireland*, (Newark, NJ: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1987), pp. 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> *MR*, xiii. 399; xiv. 361.

only because the public insisted on buying such works in great numbers and so looked to the reviews for information on new titles. As far as Johnson was concerned, editing a review journal--even one directed to a general, as opposed to a scholarly, readership--meant honoring a basic threshold of merit when it came to selecting material for review, irrespective of marketplace trends.

That Johnson chose to review neither dramas nor, it seems, poetry--the one exception being William Whitehead's *Elegies*, and this review is of doubtful authenticity--can be accounted for on similar grounds.<sup>18</sup> Writing for the *Critical Review* in December 1764, Johnson characterized Goldsmith's *The Traveller* as the best example of poetry "since the death of Pope" (1744). Five years later Johnson suggested that the post-Pope literary scene generally came up short on imaginative genius. "It was worth while being a dunce then", Johnson declares while talking about the *Dunciad*, "It is not worth while being a dunce now, when there are no wits". Johnson evidently harbored similar opinions of the English stage. "There is scarce a tragedy of the last century which has not debased its most important incidents, and polluted its most serious interlocutions with buffoonery and meanness", Johnson declares in *Rambler* 125 (1751). Contemporary comedies are equally disappointing in Johnson's view. Goldsmith's the *Good-Natured Man* (1768), Johnson is reported to have observed, "was the best comedy that had appeared since 'The Provoked Husband' [1728]". While discussing Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), Johnson claims not to know of any other contemporary

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<sup>18</sup> For the questionable authenticity of the Whitehead piece see Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 24-27.

comedy "that has so much exhilarated an audience, that has answered the great end of comedy--making an audience merry".<sup>19</sup>

What about the reviews themselves? Perhaps the most curious aspect of Johnson's reviewing in the *Literary Magazine* is that no firm connection exists between his personal interest in a given work--several of Johnson's notices are of works written by friends--and the intensity of his review. Johnson writes a remarkably obliging review of his friend Joseph Warton's *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*, as we shall see in due course. And his reviews of pamphlets related to the court martial of Admiral Byng clearly reflect his private belief that a gross miscarriage of justice was taking place. Yet the review of Charlotte Lennox's *Memoirs of the Duke of Sully*--though favorable--evidently conveys nothing more than Johnson's honest opinion of the work and is temperamentally indistinguishable from many of his other notices. The same holds true for the review of Thomas Browne's *Christian Morals*, for which Johnson wrote the prefatory biography of Browne. Indeed, competing reviews in the *Monthly* of the *Memoirs* and the *Christian Morals* are marginally more appreciative than Johnson's.<sup>20</sup> Also worth noting is that the size of any given review bears little relation to either the significance of its subject or the rigor of Johnson's analysis. At nine pages the commentary on Soame Jenyns's *Free Inquiry* is arguably the most rigorous of Johnson's reviews, but more space is allotted to the reviews of Patrick Browne's *Natural History of Jamaica* (ten pages) and Charles Lucas's *Essay on Waters* (nine and a half pages). The

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<sup>19</sup> CR, xviii. 458-62; Yale, iv. 305; Boswell's *Life*, ii. 48, 84, 233; also see *Letters*, ii. 9, 14.

latter two are well-conceived and intelligently argued reviews, certainly, but they cannot be ranked alongside the Jenyns piece in terms of critical significance. Two of Johnson's most substantive and best-known reviews, meanwhile, are amongst his briefest: the notice of Warton's *Essay on Pope* comprises just under four pages, while the review of Thomas Blackwell's *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus* covers three pages.

As works of criticism, the *Literary Magazine* reviews, together with the dozen or so of Johnson's other reviews published elsewhere, occupy one of the lower rungs--perhaps the lowest--of the Johnsonian canon, falling beneath even Johnson's prefaces and dedications and his translation/adaptation of Jerome Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia*, writings which were awarded the status of a scholarly edition.<sup>21</sup> The humble standing of these pieces is not without justification. Collectively, Johnson's *Literary Magazine* reviews offer little in the way of bold or extensive critical commentary--certainly not to a degree that would put them on par with the *Rambler* and *Adventurer* essays on authorship, say, or the *Lives of the Poets*. This hardly comes as a surprise when we take into account the uneven quality of the material available for review and the publishing pressures Johnson must have faced as the editor of a monthly general interest magazine. Also contributing to what appears at a glance to be the rather faceless character of these reviews is

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<sup>20</sup> For Johnson's use of the book review as a form of literary patronage see Brack and Holladay, "Johnson as Patron", passim; for commentary on Johnson and the court martial of Admiral Byng see *Yale*, x. 241-60.

<sup>21</sup> The consensus amongst scholars is that Johnson's reviews on the whole amount to little more than "inspired hack work", as W. J. Bate put the matter. D. D. Eddy offers general praise for Johnson's achievement as a reviewer in the *Literary Magazine*, but he provides no substantive critical analysis to validate such a claim (Bate, *Samuel Johnson*, p. 190, Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 79-94; also see Bloom, *Grub Street*, p. 177; Brack and Holladay, "Johnson as Patron", p. 179; S. W. Johnston, "The Unfurious Critic", pp. 21-22). The *Yale Edition* is not scheduled to include the book reviews as a group, though the

Johnson's well-known reticence when it came to passing trenchant or ambitious judgment on contemporary works.<sup>22</sup>

Even so, there is much more to these *Literary Magazine* pieces than initially meets the eye. Far from being on the whole nothing more than insipid hack work, as the better part of the critical heritage of these works would have us believe, Johnson's *Literary Magazine* reviews systematically and intelligently embody his broader critical outlook on such matters as the moral aims of literature and the dangers of authorial self-delusion. The critical intensity of Johnson's reviewing in the *Literary Magazine* varies, but generally speaking his reviews amount to well-crafted essays in criticism, often surpassing in perceptiveness and impartiality competing notices on the same subjects published in the highly influential *Monthly* and the *Critical*. Indeed, we cannot fully grasp Johnson's achievement as a reviewer unless we study his *Literary Magazine* notices in relation to reviews carried in the two leading review journals.

A survey of fifteen of the forty reviews Johnson wrote for the *Literary Magazine* follows, accompanied by an analysis of competing notices published in the *Monthly* and the *Critical*.<sup>23</sup> The fifteen reviews discussed in this chapter can be said accurately to represent Johnson's general practices in the *Literary Magazine*. Of the remaining twenty-five reviews, fifteen were judged to be dispensable because of space limitations, however

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*Literary Magazine* reviews of Lewis Evan's *Map of the Middle Colonies* and pamphlets related to the trial of Admiral Byng are published in the tenth volume (*Political Writings*, ed. Donald Greene).

<sup>22</sup> For a thorough discussion of Johnson's reluctance to make dogmatical pronouncements on the works of living writers see Shirley White Johnston, "The Unfurious Critic: Samuel Johnson's Attitude toward His Contemporaries", *Modern Philology* lxxvii (1979), 18-25.

<sup>23</sup> The two notices of Jonas Hanway's *Journal* are here counted as one.

much they might reward extended analysis.<sup>24</sup> The remaining ten notices, meanwhile, would be more profitably discussed in relation to Johnson's outlook on contemporary political controversies even though they are otherwise perfectly consistent with his general practice in matters of technique.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The fifteen reviews are: Birch, *Royal Society*; Newton, *Letters*; Borlase, *Observations on Scilly*; Thomas Browne, *Christian Morals*; Keith, *Catalogue of Bishops*; Parkin, *History*; Cleeve, *National Debt*; *Philosophical Transactions*; Hoadly and Wilson, *Electrical Experiments*; Keyser, *Travels*; Lennox, *Memoirs of Sully*; Bever, *Cadet*; Whitehead, *Elegies*; Murphy, *Test*; Ruffhead, *Con-Test*.

<sup>25</sup> Bower, *Affidavit, Answer to a Scurrilous Pamphlet*; Douglas, *Six Letters*, Bower and Tillemont; Evans, *Map*; the five reviews of pamphlets related to the court martial of Admiral Byng.

### Johnson's *Literary Magazine* Reviews

Stephen White, *Collateral Bee-Boxes; or a New, Easy, and Advantageous Method of Managing Bees*: reviewed 15 May 1756 (reviewed in the *Monthly*, May 1756).<sup>26</sup> Donald Greene would have us believe that the White review amounts to nothing more than a petty curiosity when he observes in his brief attribution statement that the piece is noteworthy strictly for its illustration of "Johnsonian humor at its driest". Greene doesn't elaborate, but he seems to assume that only good-natured irony can account for Johnson's spirited approval of such trifling material (*Collateral Bee-boxes* is "delightfully-entitled" in Greene's view). Greene's commentary is important for establishing the authenticity of the White review, of course, but neither Johnson's intentions nor the objectives of White's book are given proper consideration. It is worth noting, for instance, that the White notice is not relegated to the magazine's "Books and Pamphlets Published" section, which would have spared Johnson the bother of extraction and commentary, but is situated as the lead review in the magazine's premier issue. When we recall Johnson's keen interest in manufacturing and agricultural economics, moreover, the decision to review the *Collateral Bee-boxes* in the first place can scarcely be regarded as an exercise in condescension or whimsy. A more convincing explanation for this review is that Johnson looked upon the *Collateral Bee-boxes* not as a handbook

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<sup>26</sup> *Bee-boxes* is given notice, without comment, in the *Critical's* "List of Pamphlets" section for Apr 1756 (i. 291).



for the avocational gardener, as is suggested by Greene, but as a worthy example of the widespread contemporary interest in agricultural and mechanical innovation.<sup>27</sup>

Greene's reading of the White piece seems a bit hasty for other reasons as well. Comprising as it does two-and-a-half columns--the same amount of text, in fact, as is given over to Johnson's appreciative review of Charlotte Lennox's three-volume, 1500-page translation of the Duke of Sully's *Memoirs*--the White review represents a generous allocation of space for a mere sixty-three page pamphlet. And Johnson's selection of extracts demonstrates that the *Collateral Bee-boxes* was evaluated with some care. In the review's first paragraph Johnson quotes directly from White's introduction; the seven paragraphs which follow deftly summarize chapters one through six, while the ninth paragraph epitomizes the remaining six pages of the book.<sup>28</sup> Of greater significance is that the White review on a whole is expressive of Johnson's general outlook on the beneficial purposes of all literary activity.

Take for instance the opening paragraph of the review, where we find Johnson directing attention to White's authorial virtues--his benevolence, modesty, and resourcefulness--while relatively less weight is assigned to the specifics of his handbook. "The reverend author [White, the title page of the *Bee-boxes* tells us, is rector of Holton, Suffolk] of this little treatise appears to be a man of ingenuity, candor, and, what is far

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<sup>27</sup> Greene, "Johnson's Contributions to the *Literary Magazine*", *Review of English Studies* vii (1956), 367-92. For an overview of the prominence of agricultural innovation at mid-century see C. S. Orwin, "Agriculture and Rural Life", in *Johnson's England*, i. 261-99; Johnson was a fairly prolific commentator on issues related to agricultural economics: see *Yale*, x. 116-25, 301-12; Kaminski, *Early Career*, pp. 151-53; also see Johnson's parliamentary debates on agricultural topics.

<sup>28</sup> Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 87; for the *Sully* review see *LM*, i. 281-82.

more valuable, of piety", Johnson declares, "willing to communicate his knowledge for the advantage of others, and careful to learn before he presumes to teach, having, as he declares, tried every method before he found the right, and *been almost forty years in making a bee-box*". Summary and extract take up the next few paragraphs, but even in the connective commentary Johnson manages to squeeze in an additional reference to White's altruism and industriousness ("The ingenious author having given these plain and benevolent directions").<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, it is worth pausing to consider here the extent to which Johnson amplifies what are in fact occasional and rather off-handed revelations of authorial character in White's volume. In the preface to *Collateral Bee-boxes* White surveys the history of bee-keeping science, only mentioning at the conclusion of the preface his own forty-year effort to build a more efficient bee-box. Yet Johnson gives White's tenacity some prominence, paraphrasing White's remarks in the review's first sentence and placing them in italics. The pamphlet itself deals mostly with the nuts-and-bolts aspects of bee-box construction and bee-keeping. In the closing pages White admits briefly that his modest innovation won't eliminate hunger, nor can he promise that his theories will improve honey production in every region of England. White is convinced, however, that in some small way his new bee-box can alleviate human misery. Johnson includes these observations in the review, eschewing summary for the more emphatic direct quotation. Though White "cannot promise great things", he does "hope that by my method the poor

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<sup>29</sup> LM, i. 27-28.

will be benefited, though not enriched".<sup>30</sup> By its own definition White's book is nothing more than a self-help manual for bee keepers whose product is consumed chiefly by their rural neighbors, yet Johnson builds the critical core of his notice around what are in fact incidental disclosures of authorial personality.

Johnson closes his review by recommending White's book to those readers who happened to hold an interest in subjects of this sort, and it is worth noting that here--as is the case for the review overall--Johnson manages to leave a highly favorable impression of White's volume without resorting to dogmatical pronouncement. "No one, who intends the pleasure or profit of a bee-garden, should be contented with this abstract", Johnson states, but should "consult the original treatise".<sup>31</sup> White's authorial attributes entitle him to serious consideration, Johnson thus argues, but it is the marketplace--and not the *Literary Magazine*--that shall determine the true value of the *Collateral Bee-boxes*.

That the White review embodies Johnson's general outlook on the beneficial purposes of authorship, and in particular his views on the subordinate standing of the critic and the primacy of the author/reader relationship, is given greater clarity by the *Monthly's* rather condescending treatment of the *Collateral Bee-boxes*. Here is the entire critical commentary, written by Sir Tanfield Leman:

Tho' we do not pretend to be adepts in the constitution of this female monarchy, yet we imagine the method recommended by Mr. White will

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<sup>30</sup> *LM*, i. 27-28; Stephen White, *Collateral Bee-boxes*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1759), pp. i-x; 63-65. I quote from the second edition (1759) because the first was unavailable; from what Eddy's account suggests the differences between the two editions are extremely minor (*Book Reviewer*, p. 87).

<sup>31</sup> *LM*, i. 28.

answer every thing he says of it himself, in the title. The construction of his bee boxes are plain and easy to any one that can drive a sufficient number of nails, to hold four square pieces of wood together,--In his conclusion he takes notice of an error frequently fallen into by *bee fanciers*, which is, that they are fond of enlarging their stock, without considering how they are to be provided for.<sup>32</sup>

Leman glanced at White's diagrams and read the title and conclusion, evidently, but he appears to have missed completely the humanitarian aspects of White's project. More significantly--and doubtless worrisome for an author whose prospects hinged on the pronouncements of reviewers--Leman seems disdainful of White. The patronizing edge to the lead sentence, the haphazard selection of details, the characterization of beekeepers as "*bee fanciers*" (with its implication of eccentricity and dabbling) all suggest that Leman dismissed White's book as undeserving of serious attention. By contrast, Johnson's review is informative and appreciative yet free from even the slightest hint of exaggeration. The *Literary Magazine* piece manages to convey White's earnestness and his rigorous treatment of his subject matter, in other words, without overselling his contributions to modern husbandry.

**Arthur Murphy, *The Gray's-Inn Journal, in Two Volumes*:** reviewed 15 May 1756 (not reviewed in the *Critical* or the *Monthly*). Arthur Murphy (1727-1805) enjoyed a modestly successful career as an actor, playwright, and journalist, but he is perhaps best known nowadays for his biographical account of Johnson, which from 1792 until well into the nineteenth century prefaced numerous editions of Johnson's works. Johnson and Murphy had been friends for two years or so when this review appeared. In fact, it was

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<sup>32</sup> *MR*, xiv. 450.

the plagiarism of a *Rambler* essay in the *Gray's-Inn Journal* that brought Johnson and Murphy together. In considering possible topics for the 15 June 1754 number of his weekly essay serial, Murphy decided to follow a friend's suggestion by translating an oriental tale recently published in a French periodical. Readers immediately brought it to Murphy's attention that the piece was in fact *Rambler* 190 (11 January 1752). Murphy apologized for the incident in the next issue of the *Journal* and shortly thereafter went to Johnson to explain the matter in fuller detail. From the moment they met the two men, as J. L. Clifford puts the matter, "got along famously". Indeed, Murphy would eventually work for Johnson as a reviewer in the *Literary Magazine*.<sup>33</sup>

The *Grays'-Inn Journal* began life on 21 October 1752 as a column in the biweekly *Craftsman* and was issued separately from 29 September 1753 until 21 September 1754. The *Grays'-Inn* essay serial follows conventions established by the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*. Murphy adopts the amiable persona of "Charles Ranger", and writes, generally with discernment, on various contemporary social and literary issues.<sup>34</sup> Johnson reviewed the two-volume collected edition of the *Journal*, which contained the

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<sup>33</sup> *Boswell's Life*, i. 356; Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, p. 126; *DNB*, xiii. 1231-34; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 2-3. Murphy's apology appeared initially in the "True Intelligence" section of the 22 June 1754 issue; Murphy removed the apology when he prepared the two-volume 1756 octavo edition for the press (see ii. 225-331), though it does appear in an earlier quarto edition of *The Gray's Inn Journal* (London, 1753-54), p. 233: "be it known that in the last Week I received an eastern Story of *Morad* and his Son *Abouzaid*, which the Person, who sent it, told me he had translated from the *French*. As I was very much entertained with this oriental Tale, I published it last Saturday, and then learned too late, that that very same Piece was translated into *French* from a Paper, justly in great Repute, published here three or four years since". Murphy substituted a commentary on *King Lear* for the plagiarized piece when compiling the 1756 octavo edition (ii. 219-24).

<sup>34</sup> *British Literary Magazines*, pp. 140-44; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 38-39; Arthur Murphy, *The Gray's-Inn Journal, in Two Volumes* (London, 1756).

entire run of its 104 numbers. On the whole, Murphy's work is given a hospitable

welcome in the *Literary Magazine*:

THOSE who remember the entertainment which these essays gave them in the weekly publication, will be well pleased that they are collected into volumes, with the author's corrections. Those who have not read the single papers will probably be awakened to inquiry after them by the following specimen [number 93, an oriental fable that deals with the "vanity of human wishes" theme, is given in full].<sup>35</sup>

Murphy's decision to include the "True Intelligence" section of every number, however, is greeted with less warmth:

At the end of every essay are some ludicrous articles under the title of TRUE INTELLIGENCE, which are drawn up with sprightliness and humour; but as they often relate to some topic of the day already forgotten, many of them might have been omitted without loss in a book designed to last longer than such slight incidents are kept in remembrance. Some of them, however, touch upon facts that will be retained in history, and some upon subjects of general and perpetual concern. Part of them therefore can never be unseasonable, and part may shew at distant times what was the voice of the people concerning particular events, when they were yet recent, or particular questions while they were yet in agitation.<sup>36</sup>

The "True Intelligence" section was almost certainly created as a means of bolstering sales of individual issues of the *Journal* as they came out and, doubtless, Johnson speaks for many prospective book-buyers here when he remarks on the evident pointlessness of including much of this material in the collected edition of the *Gray's-Inn* essays. What invests Johnson's commentary with significance is his acknowledgment of the potential historical value of what most people--including, perhaps, even Murphy himself--probably looked upon as mere ephemera. What we see in operation here, in other words, is

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<sup>35</sup> *LM*, i. 32.

Johnson's forward-looking attitude toward journalism as expressed in the "Introduction" to the *Harleian Miscellany* (1744), *Rambler* 145 (1751), the introductory essays to the *Universal Chronicle* (1758), and elsewhere. Journalists are de facto historians, Johnson argues, and their writings may provide future generations with an indispensable record of the day-to-day circumstances which, though in themselves of little importance, collectively shape in some measure the direction of consequential events. Johnson invites readers to think of the *Gray's-Inn* "True Intelligence" section in just this light, though we are also warned that some of this material will inevitably prove to be as useless to posterity as it is to those reading it a few months after its initial publication.

**Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*:** reviewed 15 May 1756 (reviewed in the *Critical* April 1756; in the *Monthly* June 1756). In his dedicatory address to the poet Edward Young, Joseph Warton (1722-1800) promises a complete re-thinking of Pope's literary reputation, which in his view stands higher than his poetry would seem to justify. "I revere the memory of POPE, I respect and honour his abilities", Warton declares, "but I do not think him at the head of his profession". Warton's effort to lower Pope's reputation crystallizes in his ranking of the English poets. Though not assigned a specific place, Pope is situated somewhere near Nathaniel Lee (1649-92) and Thomas Otway (1651-85), perhaps, but undoubtedly beneath Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, and John Milton--England's "only three sublime and pathetic poets". The reference here to the "sublime and pathetic" introduces Warton's

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<sup>36</sup> *LM*, i. 32.

collateral objective, which is to depreciate Augustan poetics in general. A "clear head, and acute understanding" do not a poet make, Warton argues. Rather "it is a creative and glowing IMAGINATION . . . and that alone, that can stamp a writer with this exalted and very uncommon character, which so few possess, and of which so few can properly judge".<sup>37</sup> Warton thus holds that the values of Augustan poetry--its reliance on wit, for instance, and its preference for prescribed forms (e.g., satire, pastoral)--are artificial and needlessly constraining.

One curious aspect of the *Essay's* publication is that Warton mentioned nothing of it to his friend of nearly four years Samuel Johnson, which comes as something of a surprise given their apparently amiable relationship. Johnson's numerous letters to Warton suggest such friendliness, certainly, as does Warton's warm acknowledgment of Johnson's critical acumen in the preface to his edition of Virgil (1753).<sup>38</sup> In a letter to Warton dated 15 April 1756, Johnson recalls that he has "lately seen an octavo book which I suspect to be yours, though I have not yet read above ten pages. That way of publishing without acquainting your friends is a wicked trick". Johnson adds that he "will not so far depend upon a mere conjecture as to charge you with a fraud which I cannot prove you to have committed".<sup>39</sup> It remains unclear as to whether Warton immediately confirmed his authorship or whether Johnson merely assumed the *Essay* was Warton's when he wrote the review a few weeks after composing this letter. Whatever

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<sup>37</sup> Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (London, 1756), pp. iii-xi.

<sup>38</sup> *Letters*, i. 67-68; 77-78; 90-91; Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, p. 111; Arthur Sherbo, "Dr. Johnson and Joseph Warton's Virgil", *Johnsonian Newsletter* xviii, no. 4 (1958), 12.

<sup>39</sup> *Letters*, i. 133-34.



the case, Johnson ultimately wrote what was for him a remarkably indulgent review, praising aspects of Warton's scholarship while refraining from a discussion of what Johnson appears to have viewed as the *Essay*'s dubious central argument.

Such a reading, however, departs from conventional thinking on the Warton review. E. A. Bloom sees the review as one of the more probing examples of Johnson's literary criticism. "Almost every point set forth by Warton is enlarged or criticized by Johnson, evidence of a greater display of interest in his subject than he shows in many of his other reviews". Bloom adds that Johnson generally "found himself in agreement with Warton's learned judgments", and the few courteously disputatious remarks only add to the review's aura of scholarly rigor and impartiality. Donald Eddy also claims that Johnson offers a "detailed and thorough" analysis of the *Essay on Pope*. "Its subject engages Johnson's attention and interest", Eddy adds, and Johnson "brings to it a wealth of information and mature opinion". Curiously, Eddy takes note of Johnson's refusal to deal with Warton's central thesis, though he treats the matter as of incidental interest. O M Brack and Gae Holladay essentially agree with Bloom and Eddy, though they interpret Johnson's "general approval" of the *Essay* as an attempt to temper the review's occasional depreciative remarks.<sup>40</sup> Bloom and the others correctly call attention to Johnson's disagreements with Warton, but they fundamentally misread the review when they conclude that Johnson lends his endorsement to the *Essay*, or that the review exemplifies Johnson's insight as a literary critic. What the Warton piece does reveal are Johnson's

understanding of the great influence of modern reviewing and the extremes of Johnson's benevolence when it came to helping literary friends. A harsh review might drive away readers, Johnson appears to have assumed, while an abstention might be equally as harmful given the fact that increasing numbers of book-buyers were relying on review journals to help them sort through the flood of books being turned out by the commercial presses.

What evidence is there to suggest that Johnson is less than candid and thorough in his treatment of the *Essay*? To start with, Johnson's admiration for Pope should have generated a much more contentious survey of Warton's attempt to devalue Pope's literary reputation. In the *Lives of the Poets*--where as a rule Johnson seems to have assigned space proportionate to the significance of the author--Pope's biography is the largest by a substantial margin, longer than Milton's "Life" by half and dwarfing considerably the biography of Thomas Otway, who precedes Pope in Warton's ranking of English poets. In the "Life" Johnson celebrates the poetic discernment, invention, and elegance of Pope's poetry, the very aspects of Pope's reputation which the *Essay* seeks to depreciate. It is important to note, in fact, that several scholars have interpreted Johnson's emphatic defense of Pope's historical standing in the "Life" as a rebuttal to Warton's *Essay*.<sup>41</sup> Also worth considering is the following anecdote from *Boswell's Life* (31 March 1772), which offers us a conversational echo of the *Literary Magazine* review:

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<sup>40</sup> Bloom, *Grub Street*, pp. 191-92; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 89; Brack and Holladay, "Johnson as Patron", p. 181.

He [Johnson] praised Dr. Joseph Warton's Essay on Pope; but said, he supposed we should have no more of it, as the authour had not been able to persuade the world to think of Pope as he did. BOSWELL. 'Why, Sir, should that prevent him from continuing his work? He is an ingenious Counsel, who has made the most of his cause: he is not obliged to gain it.' JOHNSON. 'But, Sir, there is a difference when the cause is of a man's own making'.<sup>42</sup>

We find Johnson here expressing a fondness for Warton while simultaneously rejecting, or at least withholding approval of, the thesis of his *Essay*--much as he had done sixteen years earlier in the *Literary Magazine* review.

A close reading of the review itself reveals that Johnson's treatment of Warton is best described as diplomatic. Take the opening sentences, for instance, where Johnson manages to avoid even a mention of the *Essay*'s controversial thesis.

This is a very curious and entertaining miscellany of critical remarks and literary history. Though the book promises nothing but observations on the writings of *Pope*, yet no opportunity is neglected of introducing the character of any other writer, or the mention of any performance or event in which learning is interested. From *Pope*, however, he always takes his hint, and to *Pope* he returns again from his digressions. The facts which he mentions though they are seldom *anecdotes* in a rigorous sense, are often such as are very little known, and such as will delight more readers than naked criticism.<sup>43</sup>

Johnson normally devotes much attention to authorial intent in his reviewing, yet here we find him uncharacteristically obscure. Indeed, to portray Warton's sweeping re-evaluation of Pope as a "miscellany" which "promises nothing but observations on the writings of *Pope*" borders on misrepresentation.

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<sup>41</sup> *Lives*, iii. 216-18; 247-52; Hagstrum, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 133-37; Hilles, "The Making of the Life of Pope", *New Light on Dr. Johnson: Essays on the Occasion of his 250th Birthday*, ed. F. W. Hilles (New Haven, 1959), pp. 257-84; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 90.

<sup>42</sup> *Boswell's Life*, ii. 167; also see i. 448.

Over the next several columns the review takes on an even-handed but ultimately reticent character. Though Johnson commends some of Warton's judgments and disputes others--Warton "with much justice" calls attention to the unoriginality of Pope's pastorals; Warton argues "without proof, that descriptive poetry was by no means the excellence of Pope"--an examination of the *Essay* shows that at his most contentious Johnson does little more than nibble at the edges. Take for instance Warton's depreciation of formal criticism:

In no polished nation, after criticism has been much studied, and the rules of writing established, has any very extraordinary work ever appeared. This has visibly been the case, in Greece, in Rome, and in France, after Aristotle, Horace, and Boileau, had written their ARTS OF POETRY. . . . Whether or no, the natural powers be not confined and debilitated by that timidity and caution which is occasioned by a regard to the dictates of art: or whether, that philosophical, that geometrical, and systematical spirit so much in vogue, which has spread itself from the sciences even into polite literature, by consulting only REASON, has not diminished and destroyed SENTIMENT; and made our poets write from and to the HEAD rather than the HEART: or whether, lastly, when just models, from which the rules have necessarily been drawn, have once appeared, succeeding writers, by ambitiously endeavouring to surpass those models, and to be original and new, do not become distorted and unnatural, in their thoughts and diction.<sup>44</sup>

It would not be difficult to find in Johnson's canon of criticism assertions contradictory to the observations quoted here: the proper uses and limits of rules as discussed in *Ramblers* 125, 156, and 158, for instance; the historical evolution of criticism (a subject that Johnson himself hoped to treat at length at some point); the functions of reason and

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<sup>43</sup> *LM*, i. 35.

<sup>44</sup> Warton, *Essay*, pp. 203-04.

passion in the appreciation of literature; the nature of genius.<sup>45</sup> Warton's sweeping generalizations should have been enough to arouse a spirited rebuttal from the temperamentally skeptical Johnson, yet nothing is said on this point apart from the following brief and rather nerveless statement:

The revival of learning, mentioned in this poem, affords an opportunity of mentioning the chief periods of literary history, of which this writer reckons five, that of *Alexander*, of *Ptolemy Philadelphus*, of *Augustus*, of *Leo* the tenth, of queen *Anne*. These observations are concluded with a remark which deserves great attention: 'In no polished nation, after criticism has been studied, and the rules of writing established, has any very extraordinary book ever appeared'.<sup>46</sup>

Here and for the review as a whole, one cannot help but notice Johnson's refusal to discuss forthrightly Warton's ambitious thesis.

Another instance of Johnson's critical timidity can be found toward the end of the review:

These are the pieces examined in this volume; whether the remaining part of the work will be one volume or more, perhaps the writer himself cannot yet inform us. This piece is however a complete work, so far as it goes, and the writer is of the opinion, that he has dispatched the chief part of his task; for he ventures to remark, that the reputation of Pope, as a poet, among posterity, will be principally founded on his *Windsor-Forest*, *Rape of the Lock*, and *Eloisa to Abelard*, while the facts and characters alluded to in his late writings will be forgotten and unknown, and their poignancy and propriety little relished; for wit and satire are transitory and perishable, but nature and passion are eternal.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Boswell reports that Johnson intended to write, an "History of Criticism, as it relates judging authors, from Aristotle to the present age. An account of the rise and improvements of that art; of the different opinions of authors, ancient and modern" (*Boswell's Life*, iv. 381 and note 1).

<sup>46</sup> *LM*, i. 37.

<sup>47</sup> *LM*, i. 38.

Johnson here does indeed touch upon Warton's controversial outlook on Pope and Augustan poetics; but his commentary represents what is in fact Warton's central thesis as nothing more than an incidental observation.

Even in the concluding paragraph of the review, where a mild parthian shot at Warton's central thesis would have done little harm, Johnson persists in his obliging treatment: "In this extract it was thought convenient to dwell chiefly upon such observations as relate immediately to Pope, without deviating with the author into incidental inquiries", Johnson declares, "We intend to kindle, not to extinguish curiosity, by the slight sketch of a work abounding with curious quotations and pleasing disquisitions".<sup>48</sup> As these remarks would suggest, Johnson means to encourage a sympathetic reception for Warton's *Essay*. No reader would be put off by Johnson's courteous and carefully hedged-about criticisms, certainly, and the overall tone of the review is favorable. But equally clear is that Johnson cannot bring himself to offer convincing praise of a work which conflicts so sharply with his own views of Pope, poetry, and literary criticism. The best that Johnson can do for Warton is to applaud the worthiness of the subject matter, make vaguely approving remarks about the thoroughness of Warton's scholarship, praise a specific observation here and there, and encourage readers to investigate the work themselves.

Johnson's obliging treatment of Warton is set in relief by competing reviews published in the leading journals. Tobias Smollett's review in the *Critical* (April 1756)

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<sup>48</sup> *LM*, i. 38.

could scarcely differ more from Johnson's, as the following sentences, taken from

Smollett's lead paragraph, demonstrate:

The man of taste must expend his labours in reforming the judgment and enlightening the understanding of these pretenders [incompetent modern critics], and other novices of sensibility, before they are qualified to maintain the character they assume. This charitable task of improvement, the learned, who enjoy their ease, ought to undertake for the benefit of mankind. This is the professed aim of us, who publish our monthly lucubrations in the *Critical Review*; and we cannot help looking upon the author of the Essay now before us, as one of our coadjutors in the laudable scheme we have projected.<sup>49</sup>

Rather than engage reader interest and get the critical commentary underway as Johnson does, Smollett here insists on pausing to herald the *Critical*'s immense cultural significance: professional letters would plunge further into chaos were it not for the intellectual philanthropy of the *Critical*; readers who happen to disagree with the *Critical* essentially give proof of their ignorance, and so forth. True enough, mention is made here of Warton's volume, but even these brief and rather vague remarks are swathed in praise for the *Critical*.

Obtrusive self-promotion of this kind would be forgivable if it were followed by a discerning and well-ordered assessment of Warton's achievement. But almost immediately after congratulating the *Critical* for its insightfulness Smollett sets off in dogged pursuit of what at times prove to be rather trivial or obscure occasions to contest Warton. Take for instance the review's initial critical assertion, which does justice neither to Smollett nor to Warton:

We shall first mention a few inaccuracies in the language by which we should judge the author to be a North-briton; for, he uses the word *adduce*, a verb peculiar to the *Scotch* dialect, and several uncouth phrases, which do not seem to be of *English* growth; such as *attention irresistibly awoke*, -*developement*, *untuneableness*, *musicalness*, *seeming originality*. . . .<sup>50</sup>

The anonymous author of the *Essay*, of course, was not Scottish. Born in Surrey, Warton was educated at Oxford and, after accepting holy orders, served the Anglican Church for many years as a curate in the greater London area. Warton was employed as an usher at his alma mater, Winchester College, when the *Essay* appeared.<sup>51</sup>

The remainder of the review is largely taken up by digressive and pettifogging observations, as Smollett seems to have hastily assembled a clutch of notes in order to meet the publishing deadline. Evidently unrelated criticisms are abruptly joined together with dashes, and as Smollett's opening remarks would suggest, there appears to be little rhyme or reason behind the critical weight given (or not given) to this aspect of the *Essay* or that. At one point in the review, for instance, Smollett begins a paragraph with this observation. "In pag. 122. we are told that *Hogarth's* picture of *Richard* the third, *impresses* terror and amazement. Surely the critic meant to say, it *denotes* terror and amazement". No further context is given here, nor are readers told why this particular point merits attention. Elsewhere, the better half of a page is given over to a ham-handed analysis of what amounts to an extremely minor aside. In briefly disputing the status awarded to Petronius in the *Essay on Criticism*--"Fancy and Art in gay *Petronius* please",

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<sup>49</sup> CR, i. 227; for Smollett's authorship of this review and others by him mentioned in this chapter see Basker, *Smollett*, chapter four and the appendices.

<sup>50</sup> CR, i. 228.

<sup>51</sup> DNB, xx. 885-88.



Pope writes, "The *Scholar's Learning*, with the *Courtier's Ease*"--Warton points out that the Roman poet wrote little criticism, and in any case Petronius's style, particularly his use of metaphor, scarcely warrants high praise. To illustrate his observation, Warton gives an example of a Petronian metaphor, in which "animal conception and delivery, are confounded with vegetable production". Not only does Smollett fail to provide the necessary context for Warton's remark--that the reference to Petronius appears in the *Essay on Criticism*--but he spends a great deal of space, first, quibbling about whether or not the biological metaphor quoted was as poor as Warton claimed, and second, quoting from and remarking on fellow *Critical Review* writer John Armstrong's poem the *Art of Preserving Health* (1744) which, as Smollett reminds readers, thoughtfully explores "the idea of the earth as the general parent" of all living things.<sup>52</sup> What we see on display here, in other words, are Smollett's medical knowledge and his respect for the talents of a colleague rather than an intelligent interest in Warton's critical views.

Easily the most important illustration of the review's questionable critical priorities is that Smollett says little in the way of substance regarding Warton's advocacy of a post-Augustan poetics--"In his dedication to Dr. *Young*, he seems to undervalue the merit of versification, which we apprehend, has not yet been considered in a proper point of view", is the extent of Smollett's commentary on the matter--and no mention is made

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<sup>52</sup> CR, i. 228, 231-33; Alexander Pope, *Pastoral Poems and An Essay on Criticism*, ed. E. Audra and A. Williams (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 315, and note; Warton, *Essay on Pope*, pp. 174-75; DNB, i. 566-67. Cf. Johnson's commentary on the Petronius reference: "Pope has mentioned *Petronius* among the great names of criticism, as the remarker justly observes without any critical merit. It is to be suspected, that *Pope* had never read his book, and mentioned him on the credit of two or three sentences which he had

whatsoever about Warton's controversial ranking of Pope and other English poets.<sup>53</sup> And at the end of a review largely given over to disjointed and at times niggling criticisms, readers are again tantalized by indefinite praise for Warton's volume:

On the whole, we pronounce the *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope*, a work of taste and learning, animated with many strokes of manly criticism, replete with knowledge, and diversified with a number of amusing incidents and observations.<sup>54</sup>

To be sure, there is no shortage of material in Smollett's review that, taken by itself, is of critical interest. Smollett's brief analysis of the "improprieties" of some of Shakespeare's characters is a case in point, as is Warton's observation on the stultifying effects of formal criticism, which Smollett quotes in full. As James Basker has demonstrated, moreover, the review offers revelatory insights into Smollett's underlying critical thought.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, the spasmodic quality of Smollett's commentary may very well have alienated contemporary readers; it is hard to believe that Warton himself was much pleased with the piece even though there is no reason to suspect that Smollett's intention here is to discourage sales of the *Essay*.

Writing in the June 1756 issue of the *Monthly Review*, James Grainger offers a coherent, rigorous, and balanced assessment of Warton's *Essay*. Much to his credit--Johnson and Smollett failed to do as much--Grainger opens his review by confronting

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often seen quoted, imagining that where there was so much there must necessarily be more. Young men in haste to be renowned too frequently talk of books which they have scarcely seen" (*LM*, i. 37).

<sup>53</sup> *CR*, i. 228.

<sup>54</sup> *CR*, i. 240.

<sup>55</sup> *CR*, i. 234-35, 238-39; Basker, *Smollett*, pp. 92-97.

directly Warton's advocacy of a post-Augustan poetics and his revisionist outlook on

Pope:

Of all eminent men, none have been so much the butt of censure, and the subject of praise, as the poets; and among these none, perhaps, ever suffered more from either, than POPE; with this felicity, however, that if he has had a Zoilus in Gildon, he has had an Aristarchus in Spense, and in the Author of the present Essay. But though we think very highly of the critical and literary abilities of our unknown Essayist, and have perused his work with no less profit than pleasure, yet can we not implicitly subscribe to all his decisions, and illustrations. As he has ventured, in some things, to differ from the received opinion, so shall we be the less scrupulous in dissenting from him.<sup>56</sup>

True to his word, Grainger goes on to scrutinize Warton's evaluation of English poets, his reproach of Warton for placing Dryden beneath Otway and Lee being an especially noteworthy criticism.<sup>57</sup>

Equally significant is that Grainger's commentary frequently bears more than a coincidental resemblance to Johnson's observations in the *Literary Magazine* review, which had appeared six weeks or so earlier.<sup>58</sup> It turns out that Grainger filched what have since become known as Johnson's most effective criticisms of the *Essay*, which prompts speculation on whether Johnson approved--or even knew--of Grainger's piracy. *Rambler* 143 speaks of plagiarism as a crime: writers are "convicted" of stealing from other authors; plagiarism "stigmatizes" its perpetrators, and so on. It is thus possible that Johnson resented Grainger's plagiarism, just as he would any other species of scholarly

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<sup>56</sup> *MR*, xiv. 528.

<sup>57</sup> *MR*, xiv. 534-36.

<sup>58</sup> Whether Johnson and Grainger knew each other at this time remains merely a possibility (Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 154-56; *Boswell's Life*, i. 48, note 2); interestingly, Grainger at one point praises

dishonesty. On the other hand Grainger might have sought permission to borrow and Johnson obliged, perhaps happy to see Warton's thesis given the unvarnished analysis it deserved.<sup>59</sup>

The first instance of plagiarism centers on the imagery of the bee versus the bird in Warton's analysis of Pope's pastorals. Here is Johnson:

The critic prefers the image of *Theocritus* [who uses a bee] as more wild, more delicate, and more uncommon. It is natural for a lover to wish that he might be any thing that could come near to his lady. But we more naturally desire to be that which she fondles and caresses, than that which she would avoid, at least would neglect. . . . Which of the two images was less common in the time of the poet who used it, for on that consideration the merit of novelty depends, I think it is now out of any critic's power to decide.

And Grainger, writing one month after Johnson:

The Critic prefers the image of Theocritus as more pastorally wild, more delicate, and more uncommon. It is natural for a lover to wish to be metamorphosed into any thing that may approach his mistress. . . . But as a lover would rather wish to be changed into what his fair one caresses, than into that which she shuns, we cannot help thinking, that the Bird is more pastoral and delicate than the Bee. Which of the two images was least common in the days of Theocritus, (for upon that the merit of novelty alone depends), no Critic can now determine.<sup>60</sup>

Here is Johnson on Warton's analysis of *Windsor Forest*: "On *Windsor-Forest*, he declares, I think without proof, that descriptive poetry was by no means the excellence of *Pope*. . . . He must inquire whether *Windsor-Forest* has in reality any thing peculiar".

Grainger quotes directly Warton's remarks about *Windsor Forest*--Johnson epitomizes--

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Johnson's poetic talents: "There is certainly more distress in Banks's Q. Mary, than in Johnson's Irene; but will any one presume to say, that Banks is as good a poet as Johnson?" (xiv. 534).

<sup>59</sup> *Yale*, iv. 393-401.

<sup>60</sup> *LM*, i. 35; *MR*, xiv. 539.

and adds the following comment: "But it ought first to be enquired, whether Windsor-Forest has in reality any peculiar beauties, and whether Pope has omitted these".<sup>61</sup>

Here is Johnson on Warton's analysis of Pope's odes: "He mentions, with great regard, Pope's ode on *solitude*, written when he was but twelve years old, but omits to mention the poem on *Silence*, composed, I think, as early, with much greater elegance of diction, music of numbers, extent of observation, and force of thought". Grainger's treatment of the subject essentially mirrors Johnson's:

The ode on Solitude, written by Pope at twelve years of age, recalls our critic from his literary ramble. This little piece he considers as a strong instance of the contemplative and moral turn, which he calls the distinguishing characteristic of Pope's mind. His poem on Silence, composed two years after, would have afforded the critic a better proof, as it certainly surpasses the other in elegance of language, harmony of numbers, and power of thought.<sup>62</sup>

Grainger also parrots Johnson's criticism of Warton's credulity regarding the *Essay on Criticism's* provenance:

after having detailed the felicities of condition, to which he imagines Pope to have owed his wonderful prematurity of mind, he tells us that he is well informed, this essay was first written in prose: There is nothing improbable in the report, nothing indeed but what is more likely than the contrary; yet I cannot forbear to hint to this writer and all others the danger and weakness of trusting too readily to information.

Here is Grainger's treatment of the same anecdote:

Then detailing the other felicities of condition (*c*), to which, he imagines, Pope owed his astonishing prematurity of mind, he tells us, he is well informed, this essay was first written in prose. Tradition seldom lies so much, as when she talks of men of genius; and daily experience must teach

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<sup>61</sup> *LM*, i. 38; *MR*, xiv. 545.

<sup>62</sup> *LM*, i. 36; *MR*, xiv. 551.

every one how much we ought to be upon our guard against her informations. . . . It is, however, not improbable, that the plan of the essay on criticism was sketched out in prose; but that the whole was first composed in that dress, is not so probable.<sup>63</sup>

In yet another instance, Grainger mimics Johnson's treatment of Warton on the *Essay on Criticism*: Warton "proceeds on examining passage after passage of this essay", Johnson argues, "but we must pass over all these criticisms to which we have not something to add or object, or where this author does not differ from the general voice of mankind". Grainger makes the same point in his discussion of Warton's commentary on Pope's *Criticism*, though he alters the context a bit:

In the prosecution of this article, we shall not undertake to analyse the whole of our Author's observations. Where he has advanced any thing new, that we shall select; where any thing may with propriety be added, that we shall endeavour to supply: and where we conceive our Critic to be in an error, that we shall, with due deference, attempt to correct.<sup>64</sup>

Johnson's disagreement with Warton's criticism of the Alps simile also finds its way into Grainger's review: "We cannot agree with him in his censure of the comparison of a student advancing in science with a traveller passing the *Alps*, which is, perhaps, the best simile in our language", Johnson argues, "that in which the most exact resemblance is traced between things in appearance utterly unrelated to each other". Johnson adds that "*the last line conveys* no new IDEA is not true, it makes particular what was before general". Grainger says this about Warton's characterization of the Alps simile as unoriginal:

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<sup>63</sup> *LM*, i. 36-7; *MR*, xiv. 553-54.

<sup>64</sup> *LM*, i. 37; *MR*, xv. 52.

Here we beg leave to dissent from him; for as the poet has traced the most exact resemblance between things which, in appearance, are utterly unrelated to each other, so also does he, in the last line, really *add a new idea*, by making that particular, which before was general. In fine, we shall not easily be prevailed on, not to look upon this as one of the best similes in our language.<sup>65</sup>

What this bit of plagiarism has in common with the others is its piercing illumination of the flaws in Warton's reasoning. Such lapses in judgment, Grainger means to imply here and throughout his review, raise legitimate questions about Warton's innovative reading of Pope's poetry and his overall attempt to undermine the validity of Augustan poetics.

The fifty-two-page review closes as it began, with Grainger attempting to reconcile his disapproval of the *Essay's* thesis with his respect for Warton's scholarly talents: "Upon the whole, altho' we judge that this Essay is partly calculated to sink Mr. Pope's reputation to a lower degree in the poetical scale than he has hitherto been stationed at, yet do we hope, that the ingenious Author will continue his Observations". Grainger adds that a "Gentleman of so fine a taste, and master of so much learning, cannot fail of throwing out many beautiful and interesting particulars".<sup>66</sup> What to make of these three reviews? On balance, the Grainger piece is perhaps the most accomplished, though this is due in no small measure to its Johnsonian elements. But Johnson's review is no trifling achievement either, given the competing demands placed on it by Johnson's firmly held critical opinions and his personal regard for Warton.

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<sup>65</sup> *LM*, i. 37; *MR*, xv. 54.

<sup>66</sup> *MR*, xv. 77-8.

**James Hampton, *The General History of Polybius, in five books, translated from the Greek***: reviewed 15 May 1756 (reviewed by the *Monthly*, April 1756; *Critical*, May 1756). Though an ordained cleric by profession, James Hampton (1721-78) was best known to his contemporaries for his English-language version of Polybius's *History*, which went through at least seven editions between 1756 and 1823. It was Hampton's success as a translator of Polybius, in fact, that prompted Lord Chancellor Robert Henley (1708-72) to arrange for Hampton to be presented with the wealthy rectorate of Monkton-Moor, Yorkshire in 1762.<sup>67</sup> In the essentials--the absence of dogmatical pronouncements; a heavy reliance on extracted material; a keen awareness of the circumstances surrounding the composition of the work (in this case the peculiar challenges of translation)--the Hampton piece very much typifies Johnson's general practices as a reviewer in the *Literary Magazine*. Most readers would agree, however, that on the whole the Hampton piece stands out as one of Johnson's most appreciative reviews. The lion's share of the critical commentary appears in the review's first six sentences, quoted here:

This appears to be one of the books which will long do honour to the present age. It has been by some remarker observed, that no man ever grew immortal by a translation; and undoubtedly translations into the prose of a living language must be laid aside whenever the language changes, because the matter being always to be found in the original, contributes nothing to the preservation of the form superinduced by the translator. But such versions may last long, tho' they can scarcely last always; and there is reason to believe that this will grow in reputation while the *English* tongue continues in its present state. The great difficulty of a translator is to preserve the native form of his language, and the

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<sup>67</sup> *DNB*, viii. 1153; ix. 417.



unconstrained manner of an original writer. This Mr. *Hampton* seems to have attained in a degree of which there are few examples. His book has the dignity of antiquity, and the easy flow of a modern composition.<sup>68</sup>

While there is no question that Johnson thinks highly of Hampton's work, and that he is reasonably sure most readers will too, it is worth noting that the criticisms here are tentative and deliberately hedged: "there is reason to believe" that the translation will endure; Hampton's work "appears to be" and "seems" worthy of public approval. Johnson's reticence cannot be said to reflect a critical sloppiness or an underlying ambiguity toward Hampton's translation. Rather, what we see at work here are Johnson's well known views on the primacy of popular judgment and the provisional nature of contemporary criticism. As a reviewer Johnson is duty-bound to direct attention to worthy authors, of course, but his proposition that Hampton's volume will become a landmark in English translation of ancient texts can only be ratified by posterity.

What commands special interest in the *Polybius* review is Johnson's toleration of Hampton's failure to include historical and technical footnotes:

It were, perhaps, to be desired that he had illustrated with notes an author which must have many difficulties to an *English* reader, and particularly that he had explained the ancient art of war: But these omissions may be easily supplied by an inferior hand from the antiquaries and commentators. To note omissions where there is so much performed, would be invidious, and to commend is unnecessary where the excellence of the work may be more easily and effectually shown by exhibiting a specimen.<sup>69</sup>

Johnson's willingness to excuse Hampton's scholarly negligence and his insistence that readers look up unfamiliar terms for themselves come as a surprise here. Indeed,

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<sup>68</sup> *LM*, i. 39.

Johnson's refusal to rebuke Hampton stands at odds with the principles he had set forth in the proposals for the Shakespeare edition, published a few weeks before the *Polybius* review ("The business of him that republishes an ancient book, is, to correct what is corrupt, and to explain what is obscure"). Why, then, does Johnson applaud a book for its mass appeal when crucial terms and concepts are inscrutable to the very readers the work is intended to reach? Hampton's prefatory essay may help explain Johnson's remarkably indulgent commentary.<sup>70</sup>

The major part of Hampton's preface is devoted to a survey of Polybius's achievement as an historian, but in the final two pages readers are offered an explanation for the missing annotation:

when I first engaged in this work many years ago, my intention was, to have joined with the translation such observations and remarks, as might have served not only to explain the difficulties, but to illustrate also and enforce the strong sense and wise selections, that are spread through all the following History: to have cleared the obscurity, which arises sometimes from remote allusions, or an imperfect detail of facts: to have opened those peculiarities of customs and manners, which, whenever they occur, raise doubt and hesitation in the unlearned reader: to have pointed out the uses, or defects, of various institutions, in religion, laws, and government: and above all the rest, to have traced, step by step, the advancement of Roman greatness . . . .<sup>71</sup>

It was assumed from the start, then, that the annotations would be a critical feature of the *Polybius* edition. But "various accidents", Hampton goes on to declare, kept him from

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<sup>69</sup> *LM*, i. 39-41.

<sup>70</sup> *LM*, i. 136, 335; *Yale* vii. 51; the Shakespeare "Proposals" appeared in April; the review in May. Hampton's translation was published in March (Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 40).

<sup>71</sup> James Hampton, *The General History of Polybius. In Five Books. Translated from the Greek* (London, 1756), p. xx.

assembling the necessary material. "I have now neither leisure, nor inclination, to complete" the edition as it was originally conceived, Hampton admits:

Yet as I had gone through the most difficult and irksome, as well as the most useful part likewise of the whole performance, I was not willing intirely to suppress it. For I flatter myself, that the publick will owe me some acknowledgement, if this Translation should prove the means of spreading into many hands a treasure of inestimable value, which the roughness and inelegance, and numerous difficulties that occur, both in the language, and construction, and sense of the Original, have hitherto confined to a few.<sup>72</sup>

The importance of proper annotation is thus duly acknowledged in the prefatory note, but so too is the inevitable frailty of human nature, which left Hampton to choose between abandoning the project completely and publishing an imperfect but meritorious edition of Polybius. Johnson's writings would suggest that Hampton's frank self-assessment here was read with great sympathy. A central theme of the *Rambler* series is that our capacity to imagine ambitious achievements is often much greater than our power to realize them, and as chapter three's discussion of self-delusion bears out, in Johnson's view authors are especially prone to overestimating their abilities. Hardly less relevant here is that Johnson himself had faced similar difficulties a few years earlier with the *Dictionary*--"when it shall be found that much is omitted", Johnson declares in the "Preface", "let it not be forgotten that much likewise has been performed"--so it hardly taxes credulity if we surmise that Johnson's obliging commentary at some level reflects his own recent experiences with preparing an ambitious scholarly work for the marketplace.<sup>73</sup> Far better

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<sup>72</sup> Hampton, *Polybius*, p. xvii-xx.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. the *Plan of the Dictionary* (1747): "We are taught by the great Roman orator, that every man should propose to himself the highest degree of excellence, but that he may stop with honour at the second or

that Hampton's worthy volume should reach the bookstalls, Johnson appears to have thought, than for the work to have been abandoned for want of material that readers might supply on their own with the slightest of efforts.

Hampton was reviewed in the *Monthly* by former Prussian army officer John Berkenhout, so it is not much of a surprise to find Polybius given center stage while his modern English interpreter goes largely ignored. Almost all of Berkenhout's review is given over to summary and extract strung together by interpositions which refer to Polybius without even so much as the slightest of references to Hampton. Witness the following commentary:

In the second chapter of this book, our Historian, after having given us a geographical description of that part of Italy which was inhabited by the Gauls, proceeds in his concise, but accurate, narrative of all the wars between that people and the Romans; by which, however, the former were, at last, entirely subdued. He [Polybius] concludes his recital with the following sensible and instructive reflections.<sup>74</sup>

As this passage and the many others similar to it would suggest, Berkenhout's interest in the scholarly and aesthetic demands of translating ancient Greek into modern English can scarcely be described as exacting, and what little scrutiny there is of Hampton is not merely narrow-minded but emphatically eccentric.

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third: though therefore my performance should fall below the excellence of other dictionaries, I may obtain, at least, the praise of having endeavoured well. . . ." (p. 33); also see *Boswell's Life*: "There are two things which I am confident I can do very well", Johnson is reported to have told Joshua Reynolds, "one is an introduction to any literary work, stating what it is to contain, and how it should be executed in the most perfect manner; the other is a conclusion, shewing from various causes why the execution has not been equal to what the authour promised to himself and to the publick" (i. 292).

<sup>74</sup> *MR*, xv. 658.

Five pages into the review, for instance, we find Berkenhout reproaching Hampton for criticizing an earlier French translation by the military author Jean Charles Folard (1669-1752), which in Hampton's opinion was so sloppily done that even military scholars and enthusiasts might find parts of it unintelligible. In commenting on this point, Berkenhout avers that descriptive analysis of ancient warfare necessarily depends on a specialized idiom, and that Folard succeeded admirably in making Polybius not only readable but highly relevant to the modern-day soldier:

if Mr. Hampton had read M. Folard's Commentary with attention, he would have found that his notes frequently tend to illustrate and remove the difficulties of the original; that his system is founded on that of the antients; that his design was, by comparing the modern art of war with that of the Greeks and Romans, to convince us of our own weakness, and their superiority; and, by adapting their principles to our own times and weapons, to form a compleat system of military art.<sup>75</sup>

Hampton sought to make the writings of Polybius accessible to the lay English reader, of course, so his prefatory observations on the inadequacies of Folard's French translation go completely unrefuted here. Of greater significance is that Hampton's incidental criticism of his French predecessor, which is carried in a footnote, evidently inspired Berkenhout to draft his fifty-three page review in the form of an apologia for Folard.<sup>76</sup> "We shall also, as we go along, endeavour to give our readers some idea of M. Folard's commentary", Berkenhout declares:

by selecting from it such parts as may tend to illustrate our transcripts from Mr. Hampton's book. This part of our labour cannot, we hope, but be acceptable to those who are unacquainted with the French language, or

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<sup>75</sup> *MR*, xiv. 342; Folard's edition of Polybius appeared between 1727-30 (*EB*, x. 596).

<sup>76</sup> Hampton, *Polybius*, p. vii.

who may not chuse to purchase seven expensive quartos, the subject of which is chiefly military; yet, probably we have not a single reader who will not be glad to have some notion of a work which may be found in every library on the continent: and this the rather because we never expect to see a translation of Folard into English, as there are scarce military readers enough in this nation to purchase an impression of any thing beyond the A B C of a soldier.<sup>77</sup>

As the review unfolds we find that Hampton is forced to compete--at times unsuccessfully--with Folard for Berkenhout's attentions. Almost every page of Berkenhout's review carries at least a brief reference to Folard, and it is not at all unusual on any given page to find that extracts from Folard's translation eclipse the material taken from Hampton's text. Such is Berkenhout's concern for the reputation of Folard's edition that at the close of the first installment of the review it was thought necessary to implore readers "to look upon these, and our subsequent, Notes to this Article, as a mere skeleton of Mr. Folard's Commentary".<sup>78</sup> The heavy reliance on Folard is enough to give Berkenhout's review a firmly idiosyncratic character, but hardly less significant is that no notice whatsoever is taken of Hampton's failure to include explanatory notes--an unintended yet telling reflection, perhaps, of the extent to which the *Monthly* notice is shaped by Berkenhout's personal biases rather than a desire to offer readers a discerning survey of the work at hand.

In his closing remarks Berkenhout does manage to squeeze in a word or two about the version of Polybius he professes to review, claiming that the excellence of Hampton's rendition is amply demonstrated by the extracts and so requires no elaboration.

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<sup>77</sup> *MR*, xiv. 343-44.

As some of our Readers may possibly think, that we ought not to take our leave of this work, without mentioning a word or two, concerning the merit of Mr. Hampton's performance, we may here observe, that this has been rendered unnecessary, by the various specimens given; and which the learned peruser may, for his own satisfaction, compare with the original: whilst Readers less qualified, or less curious, will, perhaps, deem it sufficient, if we assure them, without enumerating particulars, that we look upon Mr. Hampton's Polybius as one of the best translations that has appeared in the English language.<sup>79</sup>

It would be much easier to take Berkenhout at his word here--rather than to suspect him guilty of concealing his dereliction on this point behind a veil of perfunctory praise--were it not for his earlier remark concerning the inadequacy of the two earlier English translations:

The first of these we have not seen; but Mr. Dryden, in his character of Polybius, and his writings, tells us, 'that the Greek historian in his English dress appeared under such a cloud of errors, that his native beauty was not only hidden, but his sense perverted in many places'. The second was done by Sir Henry Shears, who, in his preface he confesses, that to have done Polybius exact justice, he ought to have studied him longer.<sup>80</sup>

Given the *Monthly's* opinion of itself as a preceptor of literary taste, one might have expected Berkenhout at some point in his lengthy review to instruct readers on precisely why Hampton's translation improves upon its predecessors. Prospective book-buyers who endured Berkenhout's lengthy commentary in the hopes of learning something about the worthiness of Hampton's rendition would justifiably have felt let down when they reached the conclusion.

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<sup>78</sup> *MR*, xiv. 351.

<sup>79</sup> *MR*, xv. 669.

<sup>80</sup> *MR*, xiv. 334.

Writing for the *Critical*, Thomas Francklin offers an account of *Polybius* that is satisfactory without being in any way exceptional.<sup>81</sup> Readers are given a substantive and appreciative introduction to Hampton's volume--thanks in large measure to the nearly ten pages worth of direct quotation, including a judiciously chosen extract from Hampton's preface--but there is an overall frothy quality to Francklin's commentary that falls short of a compelling endorsement. Interestingly, the critical interjections that introduce and follow the extracted material bear a remarkable--perhaps even a plagiaristic--resemblance to the commentary in Johnson's review, which had appeared two weeks earlier.<sup>82</sup> Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge since 1750, Francklin was as qualified as anyone else to evaluate Hampton's volume. What might have happened is that Francklin, an admirer of Johnson's and possibly an acquaintance of his at this time as well, found himself in agreement with the earlier *Literary Magazine* piece and, pressed for time perhaps, decided to build his own review around what he assumed was Johnson's trustworthy assessment.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Thomas Francklin (1721-84), authored sixty-four reviews for the *Critical*. The authorship of reviews in the *Critical* published during 1756--other than those by Smollett--as well as biographical information on the reviewers is taken from Derek Roper, "Smollett's 'Four Gentlemen': The First Contributors to the *Critical Review*", *Review of English Studies* x (1959), 38-44.

<sup>82</sup> For the 15 May publication date of the *LM* see Eddy, *Booker Reviewer*, p. 40; the *Critical*--like most monthly magazines of the eighteenth century--normally appeared at the beginning of the month following that given on the title page, so this number almost certainly appeared no earlier than 1 June 1756 (see Basker, *Smollett*, p. 46).

<sup>83</sup> Precisely when Johnson and Francklin met is not known, though they were certainly on friendly terms by the mid-1770s. Perhaps the two were introduced to each other at David Garrick's wedding (London, 22 June 1749), which Reverend Francklin presided over: see *Boswell's Life*, iii. 83, 483; iv. 34, 479; G. W. Stone and G. M. Kahrl, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1979), p. 408. Francklin would later dedicate his translation of Lucian's *Demonax* to Johnson: "To Dr. Samuel Johnson, the *Demonax* of the present age; this piece is inscribed, by a sincere admirer of his truly respectable character": *The Works of Lucian, from the Greek* (London, 1780), ii. 63.



Francklin's review opens, as does Johnson's, with a spirited but nonspecific approval of Hampton's work--"we take this opportunity of congratulating the literary world on so valuable an acquisition" (cf. Johnson: Hampton's *Polybius* "appears to be one of the books which will long do honour to the present age"). Next in the way of criticism comes a brief remark on Hampton's inadequate annotation, expressed in a manner that can be read as a slapdash paraphrase of Johnson's commentary. Explanatory notes "would certainly have rendered the work more perfect, and been of great service to the unlearned reader", Francklin observes. "But since Mr. *Hampton* is otherwise engaged, we must content ourselves with the translation only" (cf. Johnson: "It were, perhaps, to be desired that he had illustrated with notes an author which must have many difficulties to an *English* reader. . . . But these omissions may be easily supplied by an inferior hand from the antiquaries and commentators"). The similarities here between Johnson's handling of the missing notation and that of his *Critical Review* counterpart are not nearly so significant as the one point of difference: reasonably well educated readers--or at least those who thought of themselves as other than "unlearned"--who bought Hampton's *Polybius* on the advice of the *Critical* and were later surprised by the extent to which their comprehension of the work hinged on perusing military dictionaries might very well have felt misled. Six pages of extract follow.<sup>84</sup>

The final two paragraphs of Francklin's notice praise Hampton in terms that recall the *Literary Magazine* piece--Hampton "has preserved an elegance in his copy, without

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<sup>84</sup> *CR*, i. 293, 296.

sacrificing his fidelity to the original" (cf. Johnson: Hampton's "book has the dignity of antiquity, and the easy flow of a modern composition")--and, interestingly, offer what seems to be an allusive attack on Berkenhout's earlier review. "As we apprehend, that to enter into a minute detail of the subject or merit of the *original*, would be foreign to the design of our *Review*", the writer for the *Critical* declares, "we have presented our readers with this short specimen of the *translation*; which, we imagine, is the only thing that can properly come under our inspection".<sup>85</sup>

All things considered, the *Literary Magazine* offers the most effective of the three reviews of Hampton's *Polybius*. If you are not terribly bothered by looking up military terms for yourself, Johnson advises prospective book-buyers, then Hampton's *Polybius* will almost certainly prove to be worth anyone's money. By contrast, readers of the *Critical* are encouraged to bring expectations to Hampton's translation ("so valuable an acquisition" to the literate world) that it cannot possibly live up to, unless a discerning word is said about the extra work entailed by the missing annotation. This is a particularly crucial oversight given that Hampton's translation was directed at the very kind of reader--the non-specialist--for whom the explanatory notes would have been a necessity. As for the *Monthly*, those who consulted Berkenhout's review may be forgiven if they could not recall Hampton's name, even if they were moved to a keener appreciation of Polybius and his modern French translator.

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<sup>85</sup> CR, i. 303.

**Thomas Blackwell**, *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus*: reviewed May 1756 (reviewed in the *Monthly* March 1756; in the *Critical* January/February 1756). Thomas Blackwell (1701-57) had been a widely respected classicist for nearly thirty years when the first volume of the *Memoirs* was published in 1753 (the second volume, which Johnson reviewed, appeared in 1756; the third volume was published posthumously in 1763).<sup>86</sup>

Scholars generally agree that Johnson's review of the second volume of Blackwell's *Memoirs* exemplifies his conservative political instincts and his irascible impatience with authors who attempt to sentimentalize the past, points neatly summarized by John A. Vance in his essay on Johnson's attitude toward historiography:<sup>87</sup>

The [Blackwell] review is most valuable not just because it demonstrates the power of Johnson's censure and arguments, but rather because it shows Johnson the skeptical historical thinker, debunking with considerable vigor romanticized impressions of the past, warning his readers to avoid facile comparisons of Rome and modern Britain, and rebuking a historian who lowered the esteem of historical writing with an awkward, inflated, and at times incomprehensible style.<sup>88</sup>

Alone among critics, however, Vance takes notice of the final paragraph of the Blackwell review, where Johnson's disposition changes suddenly from contemptuousness to appreciation. "But having thus freely mentioned our author's faults, it remains that we acknowledge his merit, and confess that this book is the work of a man of letters, that it is full of events displayed with accuracy and related with vivacity", Johnson observes. And

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<sup>86</sup> DNB, ii. 609-11; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>87</sup> See *Boswell's Life*, i. 311; Greene, *Politics*, pp. 173, 241-42; Bloom, *Grub Street*, p. 193.

<sup>88</sup> Vance, "Historical Reviews", p. 75.

"though it is sufficiently defective to crush the vanity of its author, it is sufficiently entertaining to invite readers".<sup>89</sup>

What might account for Johnson's abrupt change in attitude? "One may be tempted to argue that Johnson did not write the concluding paragraph or that he was encouraged by others or by a slightly guilty conscience to say something kind about the well-respected scholar", Vance speculates. "In any event, Johnson could be assured that these kinder words did little to soften the powerful blows delivered in the review".<sup>90</sup> Vance's surmises are plausible but ultimately unsatisfying. In the first place, it is hard to imagine the review editor who would insist on "'the choice of my subject'", to recall Johnson's conversation with Dr. Adams when he was pondering a review journal of his own, blithely accepting alterations to what would turn out to be one of his most forceful reviews.<sup>91</sup> It is conceivable, certainly, that in the final sentence Johnson sought to temper slightly the searing reproaches which dominate the critical portion of the review. But why are these mollifying remarks not blended into the argument itself, as is the case for the Hanway and Jenyns reviews, rather than inserted at the end where they are plainly ineffective, as Vance admits? As I hope to show, Johnson's magnanimity in the final sentence is in no way inconsistent with the rest of the review if we read the entire piece as at the core an exemplum of the dangers of authorial vanity.

To begin with, what Johnson does in the final sentence of the review is to shift the emphasis away from Blackwell's self-delusion in order to squeeze in a due word of praise

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<sup>89</sup> *LM*, i. 240.

for the endeavor itself. It must be said, after all, that Johnson finds nothing historically inaccurate in the *Memoirs* ("It is not our design to criticise the facts of this history"). Nor can Blackwell be accused of charlatanism ("If this author's skill in ancient literature were less generally acknowledged") or of choosing an irredeemably vapid subject.<sup>92</sup> From what the final paragraph suggests, Johnson looks upon the *Memoirs* as an undistinguished but inoffensive history--flawed in ways that should puncture Blackwell's inflated sense of achievement but on balance not unworthy of readers. What irritates Johnson is Blackwell's irresponsible and superficial political views--in particular his "furious and unnecessary zeal for liberty", i.e., his endorsement of radical political innovation and his approval of factional overzealousness--an outlook which in Johnson's view can be used to justify tyranny and social disorder. "By reference to Johnson's well-reasoned opinions on liberty and subordination, we may infer the cause of his impatience with the story of the Roman downfall", writes E. A. Bloom. "The necessity of change in the public welfare he never denied, but change brought about through violence and rebellion he abhorred". Indeed, Johnson's reference in the Blackwell review to "liberty" can be said to anticipate his later commentary on the subject, particularly in the *Lives of the Poets*. "He certainly retained an unnecessary and outrageous zeal for what he called and thought liberty--a zeal which sometimes disguises from the world, and not rarely from the mind which it possesses, an envious desire of plundering wealth or degrading greatness", Johnson declares in the "Life of Akenside", "and of which the immediate tendency is innovation

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<sup>90</sup> Vance, "Historical Reviews", p. 75.

and anarchy, an impetuous eagerness to subvert and confound, with very little care what shall be established".<sup>93</sup>

Also provoking Johnson's wrath are Blackwell's witless and annoying obtrusions, particularly his dishonest portrayal of the *Memoirs* as a pioneering achievement when it essentially amounts to a re-hash of familiar material. Johnson's treatment of Blackwell is perhaps clarified by way of a contrasting example. Jonas Hanway's *A Journal of Eight Days' Journey* (discussed at length later) is plainly an unsatisfactory piece of scholarship in Johnson's view. One might even argue from Johnson's commentary that the *Journal* has less going for it than does Blackwell's *Memoirs*. Yet Hanway is treated charitably because his is a delusion for good. Hanway's pomposity blinds him to the inadequacies of what are essentially benevolent designs. By contrast, Blackwell squanders a chance to offer a fresh and stimulating re-telling of an overly-familiar but important topic, choosing instead to place worthy historical material in the service of vanity and what Johnson sees as foolish and potentially dangerous political attitudes.

In March 1756 both the *Critical* and *Monthly* published rather mixed reviews of the *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus*, each journal concluding that Blackwell's conspicuous pedanticism blights an otherwise engrossing and well-researched subject. "It ought never to appear, that the chief purpose of an author is to shew his erudition", writes John Armstrong in his review for the *Critical*:

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<sup>91</sup> *Boswell's Life*, i. 284-85.

<sup>92</sup> *LM* i. 41-2, 239-40.

but a too constant attention to this object has, in some measure, hurt even the plan of this performance; for we find the course of the narration sometimes interrupted by philological and critical observations, which however curious, ingenious, or amusing, happen to be so foreign to the historical events, that they would make rather a whimsical appearance, even in the shape of notes.<sup>94</sup>

Armstrong offers no further analysis of Blackwell's scholarship. The rest of the review, however, is noteworthy for its detailed criticisms of Blackwell's usage, such an emphasis here and elsewhere in the review journals being a reflection of the broader debates surrounding the English language in Johnson's day.<sup>95</sup>

Writing for the *Monthly*, William Rose also berates Blackwell for his "improper" scholarly manners:

he starts so frequently from his subject, and runs into digressions, often curious, indeed, but introduced, principally, as would appear, to display his reading. He keeps himself, indeed, almost constantly in view, and stares the reader full in the face; but notwithstanding this fondness of shewing himself, his figure is far from being graceful, or his dress elegant:

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<sup>93</sup> *LM*, i. 42; Bloom, *Grub Street*, p. 193; *Lives*, iii. 411-12; also see Johnson's "Life of Milton" (*Lives*, i. 157); Greene, *Politics*, pp. 173, 240-48, and Greene's "Introduction" to the tenth volume of the *Yale Edition*, in particular pages xviii-xxxv.

<sup>94</sup> *CR*, i. 67; a poet and a physician, John Armstrong (1709-79) also published eighteen reviews in the *Critical*.

<sup>95</sup> *CR*, i. 67. For a discussion of the debates surrounding the English language in Johnson's day see Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 248-89. "One of the most ambitious hopes of the eighteenth century", Baugh and Cable observe, "was to stabilize the language, to establish it in a form that would be permanent" (p. 256). Also see Leonard A. Sterling, *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage 1700-1800* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962). "The prevailing view of language in the eighteenth century", Leonard observes, "was that English could and must be subject to a process of classical regularizing. Where actual usage was observed and recorded--even when the theory was promulgated that usage is supreme--this was, in general, done only to denounce and reform the actual idiom" (p. 14). For additional context see Basker, *Smollett*, pp. 19-22, 75-84, and *passim*; Basker, "Minim and the 'Great Cham': Smollett and Johnson on the Prospect of an English Academy", *Johnson and His Age*, ed. James Engell (Cambridge, MA: 1984), pp. 137-61; Allen Walker Read, "Suggestions for an Academy in England in the Latter Half of the Eighteenth Century", *Modern Philology* xxxvi (1938-39), 145-56.

there is a pompous solemnity that strikes us, but the true dignity of a historian is wanting.<sup>96</sup>

It is important to note that these criticisms, which appear in the review's final paragraph, follow Rose's earlier endorsement of Blackwell's vindication of Brutus for murdering Caesar. Blackwell "observes very justly", Rose states:

that a public tye surpersedes all private obligation; that the rescuing the laws and liberties of a noble nation, from the yoke of a tyrant, is the most glorious of all human actions; and that the obligation which every free citizen lies under, to contribute to it to the utmost of his power, cannot be cancelled by the tyrant's being his friend, relation, or benefactor.<sup>97</sup>

The impression Rose leaves us with, ultimately, is that the *Memoirs* provides an accurate, stirring, and highly relevant account of Augustan Rome, though readers are warned that Blackwell's incautious self-promotion occasionally grates.

It is certainly possible that the *Monthly's* endorsement of Blackwell's political outlook inspired Johnson to review the *Memoirs* in the manner that he did; perhaps the *Critical's* rather toothless evaluation played a part as well. What we can be reasonably certain of, however, is that Johnson looked upon Blackwell's *Memoirs* as an apt occasion to deal concretely with authorial self-deception and its consequences, a timeless issue to be sure but one which Johnson believed had become particularly troublesome in recent years if his scathing attacks on deluded authors in "Reflections on the Present State of

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<sup>96</sup> *MR*, xiv. 237.

<sup>97</sup> *MR*, xiv. 230; the commentary here essentially echoes Rose's review of Blackwell's first volume: the *Memoirs* reflect a "thorough acquaintance with the genius and policy of antient Rome", Rose observes, though Blackwell "is far from being happy in his stile and manner of writing" (*MR*, viii. 420-21).



Literature" (*Universal Visiter*: April 1756) and *Adventurer* 115 (December 1753) are any indication.<sup>98</sup>

Of special interest to Johnson, evidently, is Blackwell's boastful preface--

BETWEEN the end of Julius Caesar's MEMOIRS, or rather of Hirtius' Supplement, and the beginning of Tacitus's Annals, there is a GAP in the most interesting part of the Roman History. . . . It was no part of the original Plan of these MEMOIRS to supply this Deficiency, and retrieve the grand Period of the Roman Story: but being once engaged in the Series of Affairs, and having forged a Link or two of the Chain; the consequence and curiosity of the Materials, and their strict connection with the Subject, insensibly drew in the Author to fill up the Chasm. WHEN this was done, it became a Point of choice, either to sacrifice this historical Period, or to add a Volume to the Work beyond the first Design; and both the nature of the Transactions, and the Characters of the Actors (being such as hardly any other Age has produced), seemed to bespeak the Subscriber's Candor, and promise Forgiveness to the Writer, if he undesignedly doubled his own Labour.<sup>99</sup>

--which works nicely as kindling for the opening paragraphs of the *Literary Magazine* review.

The first effect which this book has upon the reader is that of disgusting him with the author's vanity. He endeavours to persuade the world, that here are some new treasures of literature spread before his eyes; that something is discovered, which to this happy day had been concealed in darkness; that by his diligence time has been robbed of some valuable monument, which he was on the point of devouring; and that names and facts doomed to oblivion are now restored to fame. How must the unlearned reader be surprised, when he shall be told that Mr. Blackwell has neither digged in the ruins of any demolished city; nor found out the way to the library of *Fez*; nor had a single book in his hands, that has not been in the possession of every man that was inclined to read it, for years and ages; and that his book relates to a people who above all others have furnished employment to the studious, and amusements to the idle, who have scarcely left behind them a coin or a stone, which has not been

<sup>98</sup> See *The Universal Visiter, and Memorialist. For the Year 1756*, pp. 159-66; Yale, ii. 456-61.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Blackwell, *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus* (Edinburgh, 1755), ii. vi-vii.

examined and explained a thousand times, and whose dress, and food, and household stuff it has been the pride of learning to understand.<sup>100</sup>

Clearly, Johnson means to rebuke Blackwell for his hubris rather than to survey the *Memoirs* itself. To grasp fully the extraordinary severity of Johnson's criticisms here one must be familiar with his four dozen or so other authentic reviews. As we have seen with the reviews of the *Female Quixote*, Tytler's *History*, and Hampton's *Polybius*, Johnson's relation to the authors under review is best understood as that of defense attorney and client. Johnson often dwells upon a favorable feature of a given work that otherwise might go unnoticed or misunderstood, or he will point out extenuating circumstances when discussing an author's shortcomings. Whatever the specifics, as a rule Johnson pleads a case for the authors he has chosen to review and then turns the matter over to the jury--readers, that is--for the final decision. In the review of the *Memoirs*, however, we find Johnson playing the role of judge, jury, and jailer in an attempt to punish Blackwell for demeaning the profession of letters with his bombast.

Rarely does Johnson refrain from calling attention to instances in which Blackwell's erudition is betrayed by his vanity. In the commentary quoted below, for example, we find Johnson making a careful distinction between Blackwell's pomposity and the essential worthiness of his subject matter:

I do not mean to declare that this volume has nothing new, or that the labours of those who have gone before our author, have made his performance an useless addition to the burden of literature. . . . But after all, to inherit is not to acquire; to decorate is not to make, and the man who had nothing to do but to read the ancient authors, who mention the *Roman*

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<sup>100</sup> *LM*, i. 41.

affairs, and reduce them to common places, ought not to boast himself as a great benefactor to the studious world.<sup>101</sup>

The thematic material here is developed further in the second installment of the review, which appeared four months after the first. One issue that looms large for Johnson in the latter portion of the review is the extent to which Blackwell's language is debauched by his self-delusion. Blackwell's "great delight is to show his universal acquaintance with terms of art, with words that every other polite writer has avoided or despised"; "In his choice of phrases he frequently uses words with great solemnity, which every other mouth and pen has appropriated to jocularity and levity!"; "His epithets are of the gaudy or hyperbolical kind". In his "Preface" to the *Dictionary* Johnson points out that words merely convey--they do not determine, nor can they be used to re-fashion--the nature of things ("Language is only the instrument of science [knowledge], and words are but the signs of ideas"). Blackwell's inflated phraseology exemplifies this very point--in reverse. What Blackwell is up to with his choice of words, Johnson would have us believe, is nothing more than scholarly alchemy. The unseemly terminology, the bathetic phrases, the "gaudy" epithets: all of this, in effect, amounts to an attempt to transform a series of shopworn observations into bold revelations about Roman history.<sup>102</sup>

The climax of the review arrives when Johnson evaluates Blackwell's discussion of the politics of pre-Augustan Rome. Blackwell's "furious and unnecessary zeal for

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<sup>101</sup> *LM*, i. 41-2.

<sup>102</sup> *LM*, i. 239-40; cf. *Idler* 70: "If an author be supposed to involve his thoughts in voluntary obscurity, and to obstruct, by unnecessary difficulties, a mind eager in pursuit of truth; if he writes not to make others learned, but to boast the learning which he possesses himself, and wishes to be admired rather than

liberty", Johnson declares, is just one of many "affectations". Reasonable people may differ over political philosophy, Johnson admits, but Blackwell's apologia for Caesar's assassins is superficial and sentimental to the point of self-parody: "who can bear the hardy champion, who ventures nothing?", Johnson asks, who "in full security undertakes the defence of the assassination of Caesar, and declares his resolution *to speak plain*"?<sup>103</sup> Elsewhere in the review, Johnson makes the same point with even greater intensity.

Dr. *Blackwell*, however, seems to have heated his imagination so as to be much affected with every event, and to believe that he can affect others. Enthusiasm is indeed sufficiently contagious [sic], but I never found any of his readers much enamoured of the *glorious Pompey*, the *patriot approv'd*, or much incensed against the *lawless Caesar*, whom this author probably stabs every day and night in his sleeping or waking dreams. . . . It is not easy to forbear laughter at a man so bold in fighting shadows, so busy in a dispute two thousand years past, and so zealous for the honour of a people who while they were poor robbed mankind, and as soon as they became rich robbed one another. Of these robberies our author seems too have no very quick sense, except when they are committed by *Caesar's* party, for every act is sanctified by the name of patriot.<sup>104</sup>

The spirited admonitions here and throughout the review thus convey Johnson's anger with Blackwell for portraying himself as courageous when he is merely deluded, for expressing intense passion for "a dispute two thousand years past", and for trying to pass off a collection of essentially commonplace observations as ground-breaking research.

**Alexander Russell**, *Natural History of Aleppo*: reviewed 15 June 1756 (reviewed in the *Critical* May 1756; in the *Monthly* August 1756). Scottish born and educated, Alexander Russell (1715-68) worked in Aleppo from 1740 until 1753 as the resident

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understood, he counteracts the first end of writing, and justly suffers the utmost severity of censure" (*Yale*, ii. 217).

<sup>103</sup> *LM*, i. 42.

physician for an English industrial project. It seems that Russell eventually managed to make a name for himself with his medical and biological researches: in May 1756--the month when the *Natural History* was published--he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.<sup>105</sup> Russell's *Natural History* can be said to exemplify the interests of the age. Travel narratives of all kinds, including natural histories of foreign locations, were amongst the most popular forms of literature produced during the eighteenth century. It is thus no surprise to find Johnson's *Literary Magazine* and the two major review journals allocating space to Russell's evidently worthy but at times ineptly conveyed commentary on the climate, population, and natural features of an Arabic city and its environs. The *Monthly* notice, the last of the three, offers mostly bland summary and extract, the few appreciative remarks which come at the end perhaps telling us more about contemporary England's indiscriminate curiosity about distant parts of the world than about the *Natural History* itself: "we should own our obligations to such writers as the Author of the Natural History of Aleppo", asserts Gregory Sharpe, "who, with great fidelity, and sufficient abilities, adds to our store of knowledge, both in natural and political history".<sup>106</sup> Generous remarks as far as they go, certainly, but nothing in the way of rigorous analysis is given elsewhere to validate the lofty generalizations made here.

John Armstrong also professes approval of Russell's *Natural History* in his review for the *Critical*, but the commendation which concludes his notice--Russell's account is

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<sup>104</sup> *LM*, i. 239.

<sup>105</sup> *DNB*, xvii. 426-27; the *Natural History* was published on 5 May (Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 42).

<sup>106</sup> Curley, *Age of Travel*, pp. 37-39 and passim; James A. Williamson, "Exploration and Discovery", *Johnson's England*, i. 88-124; *MR*, xv. 146.

"distinct, concise", and his scholarly method "rational, judicious, and simple"--bears no substantive relation to the analysis which precedes it, apart from contradicting the brief and rather controversial reproaches of Russell for his over-reliance on "*Greek and Latin names*" (the traditional lingua francas of science and medicine) and his inclusion of extensive meteorological tables (too much detail is probably better than too little in ambitious studies of the impact of climate on human health). Perhaps not surprisingly given the intense contemporary debates surrounding English usage and the *Critical's* view of itself as an arbiter of literary standards, the bulk of Armstrong's review is given over to a detailed survey of Russell's stylistic inadequacies.<sup>107</sup> What does come as a surprise, however, is that Armstrong--who was trained as a physician--neglects to say anything of substance regarding Russell's observations on the plague and other local diseases, which take up the major part of the *Natural History*.<sup>108</sup>

In his prefatory "Advertisement" Russell asks readers to make allowances for his graceless style, the inevitable by-product, he says, of many years lived where English is not spoken. "When it is considered that the Author resided many years abroad, and conversed daily in other languages more than in his own, which he had but little leisure to cultivate, the defects in his stile, it is hoped, will be forgiven".<sup>109</sup> Armstrong briefly acknowledges this but goes on to make Russell's solecisms the centerpiece of the review

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<sup>107</sup> For a discussion of the debates surrounding the English language in Johnson's day see Baugh and Cable, *A History of the English Language*, pp. 248-89; Leonard A. Sterling, *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage*; also see Basker, *Smollett*, pp. 19-22, 75-84, and passim; Basker, "Minim and the 'Great Cham'", *Johnson and His Age*, ed. James Engell (Cambridge, MA: 1984), pp. 137-61; Allen Walker Read, "Suggestions for an Academy in England in the Latter Half of the Eighteenth Century".

<sup>108</sup> *CR*, i. 361-64.

anyway. Such an emphasis makes sense in light of the intense contemporary interest in matters of usage, certainly, but one is left to wonder why more is not said in regard to the general character of the *Natural History*.<sup>110</sup> The need to convince the public of its usefulness and literary discernment in this instance, it seems, impels the *Critical* to embrace an antagonistic relation with Russell even though commonsense would counsel otherwise. Indeed, readers interested in accounts of remote locations--and they must have been legion given the great contemporary popularity of travel works--who looked to the *Critical* for insight on Russell's volume almost certainly would have been disappointed with Armstrong's review.

Johnson's review is remarkable chiefly for its relation to the *Critical* piece. In the absence of conclusive evidence one cannot be sure, of course, but it appears that Johnson either decided to peruse Russell's work after reading the notice in the *Critical* or, having already selected the *Natural History* for review when the *Critical* piece appeared, chose to craft his review in the form of a rebuttal. Though by no means a prodigious achievement, Johnson evidently concluded, Russell's *Natural History* exhibits an essential worthiness and was thus entitled to an even-handed and illuminating review.

Johnson makes no dogmatical pronouncements in the *Literary Magazine* review, though clearly he means to set forth a sympathetic overview of Russell's work. The lead sentence of Johnson's review, for instance, deftly condenses Russell's aims as stated in the *Natural History*'s prefatory "Advertisement". Russell initially set out to catalogue the

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<sup>109</sup> Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo* (London, 1756), pp. v-vi.

diseases of Aleppo and its environs, Johnson states, but he was "insensibly led to enlarge his plan, into an account of the natural productions of the place and the customs of the inhabitants". In the next two sentences the review more obviously takes on the character of a rebuttal. Russell "makes no magnificent professions, and has performed as much as he promised", Johnson declares in what can be read as a response to *Critical's* emphasis on the *Natural History's* inadequacies. "His accounts have all the appearance of truth, and his stile, though it has been censured, is not more vitious than that of many writers, who have had better opportunities of cultivating our language".<sup>111</sup> Russell is a trustworthy if not a particularly eloquent natural historian, in other words, and while his volume cannot be ranked with the greatest of its kind, it is worth recalling that his objectives were rather modest to start with. Interestingly, Johnson here pauses to vindicate Russell from the criticisms directed at his style by the *Critical*. This is a distinctive trait of Johnson's reviewing: we often find him attempting at some level to negate what we might term exploitative censures found in the *Monthly* or the *Critical*, that is, attacks centering on imperfections admitted to in the prefatory material of the work under review. In this case Johnson evidently believed, first, that Russell's stylistic problems were not quite the nuisance suggested by the *Critical* and, second, that Russell's admission of such problems in the prefatory material--far from warranting censure--reflects a stalwart devotion to truth.

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<sup>110</sup> *CR*, i. 361-62.

<sup>111</sup> *LM*, i. 80.



Of perhaps greater significance is that in the twelve columns of extract which complete the Russell review, Johnson avoids quoting from the weakest sections of the *Natural History*, though these areas are noted: "there is nothing very observable" in Russell's descriptions of diseases; Russell's meteorological tables are similarly unremarkable. Instead, the emphasis is given over to the more attractive aspects of Russell's work. Nearly five columns are devoted to an abridgment of Russell's descriptive analysis of the plague, observations which Johnson claims "deserve particular regard". Readers are also introduced to Russell's survey of Aleppo's exotic wildlife--"the *sheep with the great tail*"; "*Hyenas* . . . of which our author had the opportunity of examining one that was killed"; "*serpents* extremely venomous"--and the day-to-day lives of Aleppo's inhabitants--"their beds which consist only of a matrass and a coverlet, are made in summer on the top of the house"; "When they are at home they amuse themselves with chess"--and it is worth noting here that Johnson relies not on direct quotation in relating details of this kind but on skillful summary. Indeed, Johnson's narration creates the impression that Russell is a much better stylist than he actually is.<sup>112</sup>

All things considered, the Russell review very much lives up to the pledges Johnson makes in the *Literary Magazine's* prefatory note: an attempt is made to defend a worthy author from unreasonable criticisms, while readers are given an appreciative introduction to a flawed work, certainly, but one hardly devoid of meritorious observations, as the generous amount of extracted material demonstrates. Readers nowadays may be inclined

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<sup>112</sup> *LM*, i. 80-84; also see Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 43.

to dismiss this review as a trifling bit of commentary--a view not without justification given the paucity of forthright, trenchant criticism. But if we try to put ourselves in the position of a contemporary reader with an interest in natural history who also happened to read Armstrong's earlier piece, Johnson's review takes on much greater critical force. This is particularly true with regard to the discerning selection of quotation and the intelligent abridgments, which may have been just enough to convince even skeptical book-buyers that Russell's volume was worth consulting.

**Francis Home, *Experiments on Bleaching*:** reviewed 15 July 1756 (reviewed in the *Critical March* 1756; in the *Monthly* May 1756). Francis Home (1719-1813) made his living as a physician and as a professor of medicine in Edinburgh, but he also managed to publish some eight works on topics ranging from the one under consideration here to virology and surgical procedure. Before discussing the reception of *Experiments on Bleaching*, Home's second publication, it is worth pausing to consider Home's prefatory "Advertisement":

At the desire of the Honourable Board of Trustees for the improvement of fisheries and manufactures in North Britain, the following treatise was composed, read in different lectures, and the experiments, so far as it was possible, were performed before the bleachers of this country. It is now published in consequence of a petition presented by the bleachers to the Honourable Board of Trustees<sup>113</sup>

Sponsored by a provincial trade organization and directed specifically at fellow artisans, *Experiments on Bleaching* might very well have alienated its intended readership had

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<sup>113</sup> Francis Home, *Experiments on Bleaching* (Edinburgh: Kincaid and Donaldson, 1756); the "Advertisement", which appears in front of the text, is not paginated.

Home not relied on specialized terms and provincial expressions. Though the "Advertisement" is as clear as one may reasonably expect in spelling out the occasion for the work and its objectives, Tobias Smollett chose to downplay the importance of Home's prefatory declarations even though he neatly paraphrases the remarks in the opening paragraph of his review for the *Critical*. To be sure, Home's good intentions are acknowledged--he deserves credit "for having dedicated his time and talents to the improvement of the linen manufacture which is the staple commodity of his country"--and Smollett does offer a kindly word for discrete observations found in the work--Home's "remarks upon the inconveniences that attend the common methods of bleaching, are extremely judicious".<sup>114</sup> But it is significant that Smollett ultimately censures the very features which the intended readership of *Experiments on Bleaching* probably found congenial, if not indispensable. Home's "experiments"--the heart of his treatise, after all--"are painfully described", Smollett asserts in the review's concluding paragraph:

Surely there is a less unpalatable way of communicating natural knowledge. Any reader will peruse with pleasure the chymical works of *Boerhaave*, *Stahl*, and *Homberg*; but we believe no person, but a mere whitster, or a writer in either REVIEW, will ever drudge through Dr. Home's treatise on bleaching; which nevertheless, we pronounce a valuable performance, though like the green linen he describes, *steeped and rinsed clean of all flummery and dressing*.<sup>115</sup>

It would be tempting to attribute Smollett's imperiousness here to a commendable if rather heavy-footed attempt to enforce standards in scholarly discourse, but there seems to be more at work here than well-intentioned fastidiousness in matters of diction.

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<sup>114</sup> CR, i. 106-07.

It is worth noting, for instance, that Smollett ignores the stipulations of Home's prefatory remarks when he insists on making what can only be described as unreasonable comparisons of *Experiments* to the works of Wilhelm Homberg (1652-1715), Georg Ernst Stahl (1660-1734), and Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738).<sup>116</sup> True, like Home these men were trained in medicine and at various points published scholarly works on chemistry. But in *Experiments on Bleaching* Home clearly addresses an unscholarly class of reader and in the service of a commercial rather than an academic end. To write at the level of a Homberg or a Stahl would be self-defeating on the order of, say, hoping to meet the demands of today's do-it-yourself automobile repair market by substituting an Oxford D.Phil. thesis on mechanical engineering for one of the popular self-help manuals. As a novelist, playwright, poet, and journalist, Smollett must have been keenly sensitive to authorial efforts to calibrate one's material to a specific class of reader. Why, then, does Smollett insist on evaluating Home's treatise against a standard it was not designed to meet? It is a matter that cannot be proved conclusively of course, but one credible explanation is that Smollett seeks to validate what he sees as the adjudicatory function of reviewing. Literary works have no artistic merit outside of what the *Critical Review* assigns to them, so authors hoping for a favorable review are well advised to take into account the literary tastes of the *Critical Review*. Home's book meets the expectations of its intended readership well enough, Smollett admits, but we are also given to understand that Home's vulgar tonalities offend the refined scholarly sensibilities of the *Critical*

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<sup>115</sup> CR, i. 114. For Smollett's attitude toward Scotticisms see Basker, *Smollett*, pp. 82-84.

*Review*, a fact which determines the character of the review at least as much as its suitability for those interested in advanced techniques in bleaching.

Sir Tanfield Leman's review in the *Monthly* is noticeably more sympathetic than its *Critical Review* predecessor: "genius or science" cannot be "more advantageously employed", Leman declares, "than when they are directed to disquisitions that immediately tend to facilitate or improve such particular branches of trade or commerce, as serve to find continual business for numbers, and consequently bring a considerable increase to the national wealth". *Experiments on Bleaching* "promises greatly to answer so commendable a design; at the same time that it also evinces, how far commerce may be benefitted by the aid of philosophy". Given Johnson's own views on the symbiotic relation between practical arts and "philosophy", it is at least possible that Leman's appreciative review encouraged Johnson to consult Home's treatise.<sup>117</sup>

Johnson's review of Home appeared in July, two months after Leman's.

*Experiments in Bleaching* "is one of the few books which philosophy has condescended to give mankind for the improvement of the lower arts", Johnson declares in the lead sentence, perhaps consciously seconding Leman's earlier judgment. Most of the review is given over to extract and summary, though the occasional interjections reminding readers of the usefulness of Home's treatise (it "may justly excite curiosity"; his commentary on hard water "is of great importance"; one section contains "very curious experiments")

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<sup>116</sup> For a biographical sketch of Home see the *DNB*, ix. 1122-23; for Boerhaave, Homberg, and Stahl see *EB*, iv. 115-16; xiii. 624-25; xxv. 760.

<sup>117</sup> *MR*, xiv. 428-29.

manage to sustain the distinctly favorable tone of the opening sentences.<sup>118</sup> At one point Johnson allows Home to speak for himself on the beneficial potential of his innovative water filtration system, a secondary discovery in relation to the stated objectives of *Experiments*, certainly, but one that evidently promises a usefulness far beyond the bleaching trade:

'This method which we have discovered of softening hard waters, is easy, expeditious, and cheap; qualities absolutely necessary to render it useful to the public. It is easy, as the most ignorant can do it; expeditious, as it becomes fit for all family uses immediately, and for drinking in half an hour; and cheap, as the material costs but a mere trifle; nay, may be prepared by any person'.<sup>119</sup>

Home's research on bleaching, it seems, led to the discovery of a simple yet effective water processing technique which offers poor and lower-middle-class readers a means to remove a nagging inconvenience from their lives. While it is true that Smollett makes mention of Home's section on hard water, and Leman devotes two pages to a summary of this portion of Home's book, only Johnson gives emphasis to the philanthropic potential of Home's innovation in water processing. In the *Literary Magazine* Home is ultimately portrayed as a humanitarian rather than a mere mechanic or artisan. By contrast, the two major review journals cast Home either as a resourceful but obscure technician whose work bears no meaningful relation to the lives of most people (Smollett: "no person, but a mere whitster, or a writer in either REVIEW, will ever drudge through Dr. Home's treatise"), or whose achievement is noteworthy chiefly for its shimmering, remote

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<sup>118</sup> *LM*, i. 136-41.

<sup>119</sup> *LM*, i. 140; also see Home, *Experiments*, p. 297.

symbolic value (Leman: "how far commerce may be benefitted by the aid of philosophy").

Of additional significance is that Johnson's apologetic treatment of Home's provincial expressions can be read as a counterpoint to Smollett's earlier criticisms. There is no conclusive evidence that Johnson writes with the *Critical* in mind here, though in the following quotation Johnson walks a fine line between acknowledging Home's diction for what it plainly is--an impediment to sales in the relatively lucrative English market--and defending Home's prerogative to write in an idiom commensurate with his subject matter and his intended readership. Indeed, Johnson apparently believes that the *Experiments* can reach a readership far greater than its author realizes, provided of course that the English public are prepared in advance to tolerate Home's reliance on obscure terms and expressions:

[Home's] performance is indeed rather useful than pleasing, sometimes obscured by the use of terms, which none but bleachers understand, and sometimes made unpleasing to an *English* ear, by words and phrases never uttered on this side of the *Tweed*. But the author wrote for his countrymen [Scots], and his business was rather to instruct than to delight. It had yet been proper to have told the meaning of words peculiar to the trade on which he treats, but we seldom suspect others of ignorance in things which daily use has made familiar to ourselves.<sup>120</sup>

*Experiments* occasionally makes difficult reading for the non-specialist and the non-Scot, and Home probably should have added at least a few explanatory notes given the broader significance of some of his observations. But such minor imperfections should not be

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<sup>120</sup> *LM*, i. 136; cf. *Idler* 70: "They that content themselves with general ideas may rest in general terms; but those whose studies or employments force them upon closer inspection, must have names for particular

held against the author, Johnson argues, nor should the overall worthiness of Home's work be doubted.

It is worth noting that on the whole Johnson and Smollett agree on basic critical matters: the roughness of Home's language, the virtuousness of his intentions, the soundness of his scientific method. What separates the two reviews is the attitude each takes toward his subject matter. To one degree or another Smollett strives to exalt the *Critical* at the expense of Home. Johnson, meanwhile, acts as a broker of sorts, introducing the general public to a work that carries a much broader appeal than is suggested by its title. Significantly, Johnson's observations on this point turned out to be right on the mark: *Experiments* was soon translated into French and German, earning along the way a "gold medal" from the Edinburgh Society for the Improvement of Arts and Sciences.

**Stephen Hales, *An Account of a useful Discovery to distill double the usual Quantity of Sea-Water*.** Reviewed 15 July 1756 (reviewed in the *Monthly* May 1756).<sup>121</sup> Parish priest, physiologist, inventor, and Fellow of the Royal Society, Stephen Hales (1677-1761) devoted much of his life to philanthropic causes.<sup>122</sup> The *Useful Discovery* was amongst the last of a procession of works by Hales that addressed humanitarian concerns, so it is hardly surprising to find Sir Tanfield Leman paying homage to Hales's altruism--"This worthy and assiduous philosopher, whose labours have been long devoted

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parts, and words by which they may express various modes of combination, such as none but themselves have occasion to consider" (*Yale*, ii. 219).

<sup>121</sup> The *Critical* gives notice to the *Discovery*, without commentary, in its "List of Pamphlets" section for April 1756 (i. 289).



to serve the real interests of mankind"--in his brief but appreciative review in the *Monthly*. Equally unremarkable given the evident significance of the material at hand is that Leman promptly moves on to make undoubtedly pertinent but rather arcane observations on water distillation: "from our Author's experiments it appears, that chalk in the proportion of half an ounce to a gallon of water, answers all the intention of Mr. Appleby's *lapis infernalis*, and calcined bones; and Dr. Butler's capital soap-lees", et cetera.<sup>123</sup>

The *Literary Magazine* also gave favorable notice to the *Useful Discovery*. But quite unlike his *Monthly Review* counterpart, Johnson insists on making Hales's humanitarianism and highly refined scholarly manners the centerpiece of his review while the scientific aspects of the *Useful Discovery* are very much underplayed. In the following passage, for instance, we find Johnson striving to bring out the inspirational value of Hales's researches while the "useful discovery" itself is characterized as of secondary importance:

There was still wanting some method of quickning distillation, and this Dr. Hales has at length discovered, and imparted with candour more to be admired than even his sagacity; for he has ingenuously traced it from the first hint, that he may receive no more than his due share of honour.<sup>124</sup>

The suggestion here is that the potential economic and political impact of Hales's discovery was such that he may have been tempted to grab much more of the credit than he really deserved. England, after all, was growing increasingly reliant on its navy and

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<sup>122</sup> *DNB*, viii. 917-19.

<sup>123</sup> *MR*, xiv. 446.

<sup>124</sup> *LM*, i. 143; also see Stephen Hales, *An Account of a Useful Discovery* (London, 1756), pp. 3-5.

the transoceanic trade, and the projector who managed to increase the efficiency of these operations would quite justifiably earn the gratitude of the nation. Yet Hales avoids using his discovery as an occasion for self-aggrandizement; indeed, he seems to have gone to great lengths to portray his own contributions as nothing more than the pinnacle of a grand edifice. Brief though it is, the passage quoted above illustrates the extent to which Johnson's book reviewing embodies his general outlook on authorship. Johnson understood well the inherent instability of scientific inquiry, today's discoveries in his view being subject to reversal, extension, qualification, or irrelevancy by future investigations.<sup>125</sup> Rather than offer what might turn out to be unwarranted praise for the "useful discovery", Johnson instead places the emphasis on Hales's exemplary authorship.

That Johnson intends to celebrate Hales more for his general authorial qualities than for his expertise in hydrology also finds expression in the extracts chosen for the review. Take the lead quotation, for instance, where Hales's unpretentiousness and his eagerness to credit predecessors are on display: "*Mr. William Baily of Salisbury-Court, the author of many ingenious contrivances, shewed me, in a small model of a tin vessel, a method by which he has happily increased the force of the engine to raise water by fire*". Observing this experiment led Hales "to think that a greater quantity of liquor might also by this means be distilled".<sup>126</sup> Even Hales's scientific manner of proceeding is mined for its underlying humanistic lessons. "We shall exhibit the process of his discovery",

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. *Rambler* 106: "Some writers apply themselves to studies boundless and inexhaustible, as experiments in natural philosophy. These are always lost in successive compilations, as new advances are made, and former observations become more familiar" (*Yale*, iv. 203).

<sup>126</sup> *LM*, i. 143.

Johnson says in his introduction to the extract portion of the review, "for the art of improving hints, and tracing one consequence from another, is of more importance than the distillation of ten waters". Interestingly, the remarks accompanying the technical quotations are far less appreciative, and in a few instances we find Johnson expressing doubts about Hales's accuracy and comprehensiveness. The technique recommended for removing salt "appears to be a great improvement; yet I am not certain whether it can be turned to much advantage", Johnson declares, because "Speculation is fallacious", and "experiments in small quantities deceive". Elsewhere in the review Johnson questions some of Hales's mathematical calculations, though he admits that in doing so he addresses "what the Doctor understands better than I".<sup>127</sup> Johnson is predictably reluctant here and throughout the review to characterize Hales's scientific conclusions as flawless or definitive. What is not open to question, however, is Hales's altruism, academic scrupulousness, and his commendably earnest pursuit of the truth.

**Charles Lucas, *Essay on Waters*:** reviewed 15 August 1756 (reviewed in the *Critical* May 1756; in the *Monthly* August 1756). Charles Lucas (1713-71) made a name for himself initially as a political reformer. In 1748 Lucas campaigned in his native Dublin for a seat in the House of Commons, publishing as part of his candidacy several pamphlets decrying parliamentary corruption. Arrested at one point for his allegedly treasonous writings, Lucas managed to escape an almost certain prison sentence by fleeing to London in late 1749. Lucas eventually managed to transcend his status as a

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<sup>127</sup> *LM*, i. 143-44.

fugitive from justice. In 1752 he completed his training in medicine at the University of Leyden, setting up a practice in London shortly afterward. His career as an author of medical works, however, was not without controversy.

Lucas's three-volume *Essay* professes to examine the chemical properties of water and to consider fully its far-reaching medical and economic applications. A collateral aim of the *Essay* is to reform English spelling--though Lucas's "system" of orthography is not merely unpersuasive but eccentric to the point of self-parody.<sup>128</sup> It is important to note here that Lucas's work is heavily polemical--particularly the third volume--being as it is one salvo in a much broader contemporary controversy surrounding the exact nature of the mineral spas at Bath and Bristol.<sup>129</sup> Also very much in the foreground are Lucas's political struggles of the 1740's. In his "Dedication" to the Prince of Wales, for instance, Lucas professes unwavering loyalty to King George II, whose government a few years earlier had bent all the rules in an attempt to silence his dissent:

Yet, pardon mine ambition, to let YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS see my sentiments of loyalty and gratitude upon this occasion; though I am, I hope, the Onely [sic] living subject, that can of a truth complain of having been denied the potection [sic], that even criminals enjoy from our laws; having notoriously suffered the Oppressor's Wrongs, the Laws Delay, and the Insolence of Office, to say no more; and that, without any taste or prospect of redress; Notwithstanding, I can call upon my bitterest enemies to attest, that it has not been in the power of persecution and adversity to pervert my senses, so far as to make me impute the unauthorised outrages of Substitutes to the PRINCIPAL, or make me one moment disregard or forget the DELIVERERS of my country, the RESTORERS and PRESERVERS of our most valuable, our POLITICAL HEALTH.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Lucas's objectives are set forth in his "Preface" (*Essay*, i. xv-xviii).

<sup>129</sup> G. S. Rousseau, "Bramble and the Sulphur Controversy", *Journal of the History of Ideas* xxviii (1967), 577-89.

<sup>130</sup> Lucas, *An Essay on Waters* (London, 1756), i. viii.

One gets an idea here of the great obstacles facing Lucas. Despite the passage of the better part of a decade, Lucas still sees a necessity in refuting lingering accusations of treachery, and even this rather straightforward task appears to be fraught with much hazard if the remarks here are any indication.<sup>131</sup> In reminding the public of his steadfast adherence to noble political principles in the face of flagrant government oppression Lucas assumed, probably correctly, that the slightest suggestion of disloyalty to the House of Hanover would jeopardize whatever chance he still might have had of putting to rest his lingering reputation as a political agitator. Lucas's sense of estrangement becomes even more discernible in the "Preface", where he rebukes critics in the scientific community for dredging up long-dormant legal problems in an effort to undermine the credibility of his research. "Of all the various ill-natured means of detraction, that have yet been devised" by those who disagree with the balneological (the study of baths) theories advanced in the *Essay*, Lucas declares:

the most remarkable, are the calling my moral and political character, and even mine understanding, in question, and attempting to cast reflections from my late profession.--'Who is this,' says one, 'that is come to decry our waters?'--'A fellow,' answers another, 'that was forced to fly his own country, and will never be quiet, till he is forced to fly this. . . . 'Ay,' says a third, 'I have heard of him; no body will mind him; a mere mad man!'<sup>132</sup>

With all of these circumstances pressing on him, Lucas undoubtedly nursed keen hopes that the *Essay's* fate in the marketplace would not only vindicate his controversial

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<sup>131</sup> Also see Lucas's *An Appeal to the Commons and Citizens of London . . . by the Last Free Citizen of Dublin* (London, 1756).

<sup>132</sup> *Essay on Waters*, i. xviii.

balneological theories but also set him free, finally, from the vestigial popular view of him as a rabble-rouser.

How did Lucas and his *Essay* fare in the press? Writing for the *Critical*, Tobias Smollett turns in a thoroughgoing and basically well-conceived critique of Lucas's researches--hardly a surprise given Smollett's formal medical training and his intelligent avocational interest in the physical sciences.<sup>133</sup> What makes this review interesting is not this technical remark or that, however, but Smollett's intense dislike for Lucas which surfaces repeatedly in his choice and treatment of material and leads Smollett, ultimately, to dismiss the *Essay*.

It is important to point out here that Smollett himself had written a treatise on balneology some four years earlier. Smollett's *Essay on the External Use of Water* amply demonstrates that he and Lucas were essentially in agreement on the contemporary controversies surrounding balneology, particularly with regard to what Lucas sees as the maladroit administration of the spas at Bath. Yet we find Smollett reproving Lucas in the *Critical* for assertions that he himself had advanced in his own *Essay on the External Use of Water*.<sup>134</sup> Take for instance Smollett's commentary on Lucas's general outlook on the hygienic conditions at Bath. "After having read this learned treatise of Dr. *Lucas*, we cannot help wondering how the hot-springs of *Bath*, acquired their reputation", Smollett

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<sup>133</sup> Basker, *Smollett*, pp. 118-ff; Lewis Knapp, *Tobias Smollett: Doctor of Men and Manners* (Princeton, 1949), chapter seven.

<sup>134</sup> Tobias Smollett, *An Essay on the External Use of Water in a Letter to Dr. \*\*\*\*, with Particular Remarks upon the present Method of using the Mineral Waters at Bath in Somersetshire, and a Plan for rendering them more safe, agreeable, and efficacious* (London, 1752). For Lucas's commentary on the

observes rather sneeringly, "considering how injudiciously they have been administered--  
 -Is it possible that any person could ever return alive from the use of the waters at  
*Bath*"?<sup>135</sup> The purpose of Smollett's earlier treatise was to call attention to "the necessity  
 of reforming" the Bath spas and to root out the numerous "evils and defects" inherent in  
 the administration of these enterprises, so it is something of a surprise to find him  
 criticizing Lucas for embracing the same cause.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, Smollett's volume is hardly  
 destitute of the very kind of hyperbole which makes Lucas's *Essay* such an enticing  
 subject for ridicule. Witness the following dire prophecy which precedes Smollett's  
 eleven proposals to reform the Bath spas:

we have reason to believe, that some attention will be paid to those  
 fountains flowing with health, which, at a very moderate expence, might  
 be so improved as to become the greatest boast, ornament, and blessing of  
 these kingdoms. --- But, if our expectations from the legislature should be  
 disappointed, and the Corporation of *Bath* still turn a deaf ear to the  
 proposals which have been made; the proprietors of other Baths, either in  
 this, or in any other country, will probably take the hints which they have  
 rejected, and then they may chance to see their Springs deserted, and their  
 town utterly impoverished and ruined.<sup>137</sup>

When set side-by-side, the works of Lucas and Smollett would lead us to believe that the  
 two are soul-mates, not only in regard to their positions on balneological controversies  
 but also in their mutual preference for alarmist idiom.

Why Smollett takes stands in the *Critical* that directly contradict the views  
 expressed in his own treatise on balneology is never stated forthrightly, but there is plenty

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Bath spas see *Essay*, iii. 259-83, 333-41. For a full consideration of Smollett and Lucas see Rousseau,  
 "Bramble and the Sulphur Controversy", passim; also see Knapp, *Smollett*, pp. 146-50.

<sup>135</sup> *CR*, i. 344-45.

<sup>136</sup> Smollett, *Water*, pp. 34-38.

of evidence to suggest that Smollett is irritated not by the propositions contained in the *Essay* itself--which, as his own writings tell us, Smollett largely agrees with--but by Lucas's overweening vanity and his scholarly dishonesty, not to mention what Smollett sees as Lucas's irresponsible political activities of the 1740's. Smollett evidently looks upon Lucas as a raffish pretender, an unscrupulous, irascible crank who is completely out of place in the exalted environs of professional letters. The purpose of Smollett's review, it seems, is to cement just this image of Lucas in the public mind. Smollett dare not endorse what are in some instances Lucas's sensible ideas on balneology, for fear of engendering an unwarranted respect for the man himself.

That Smollett aims to blacken Lucas's character--or, more accurately, to unmask what Smollett sees as his unjustified claims to respectability--manifests itself in the emphasis placed on Lucas's troubled past and his eccentric, abrasive personality. Take for instance Smollett's lead sentences, which are heavily freighted with malevolent irony:

NATURE still continues to produce great and stupendous geniuses, howsoever they may be over-looked or opposed by the ignorance or envy of mankind. Two such have lately appeared like comets in our hemisphere; in the contemplation of whose labours, we know not whether most to admire, the acuteness of penetration, the extent of learning, the strength and solidity of argument, the candour, modesty, patriotism, or singularity in station, study and circumstance, that denote them so consummate and congenial. Both are apothecaries, chemists, physicians and politicians. Both have shone like *Phosphorus* amidst the mists of ignorance and prejudice: both have corroded like the *lapis infernalis*, an imposthumated administration big with foulness and corruption; and both have been over-whelmed and well nigh dissolved in the discharge that ensued. Many moons have not revolved since one of these illustrious adepts obliged the world with a performance, in which he plainly

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<sup>137</sup> Smollett, *Water*, pp. 39-40.



demonstrated the absurdity of the practice adopted by all his contemporaries, and blew up their whole medical system by means of a mine kindled with electrical fire. . . . That judicious reformer's worthy compere is the learned author of the treatise which now falls under our examination.<sup>138</sup>

By the time this review was published in May 1756 Smollett had already written a scathing, personally abusive notice of Lucas's political apologia, *An Appeal to the Commons . . . by the last Free Citizen of Dublin* (March 1756), and an equally searing, ad hominem review of a political pamphlet by the other author alluded to here, John Shebbeare (January/February 1756).<sup>139</sup> The notice of the *Appeal to the Commons* suggests that Smollett looked upon Lucas not as a legitimate participant in contemporary political controversies but as a self-deluded, noisy pest whose flamboyant lawlessness and inane yet provocative writings made him into something of a celebrity. "Some people unacquainted with the real character of" Lucas, Smollett says in his review of the *Appeal to the Commons*, "might be apt, from the circumstances of his expulsion and the nature of this appeal, to look upon him":

as a turbulent partisan, who wanted to fish in troubled waters; who having miscarried in his own country, endeavours to foment factions and disturbance in the city of *London*: to us, however, he appears in the light of a weak, enthusiastic democratic; who, had he lived in the reign of *Charles I*, would, with *Leighton*, *Pryn*, and *Lilburn*, have received more flagrant marks of the ministry's regard.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>138</sup> CR, i. 321-22.

<sup>139</sup> In Smollett's review of Lucas's *Essay on Waters* the initials "Sh\_\_\_" only are given to identify the other author, but the remarks quoted here conform to events in Shebbeare's life between 1740-55: see *DNB*, xviii. 1-4. For additional context see James R. Foster, "Smollett's Pamphleteering Foe Shebbeare", *Publication of the Modern Language Association* lvii (1942), 1058-1100; for the earlier review of Shebbeare see CR, i. 88-90.

<sup>140</sup> CR, i. 169-70; Alexander Leighton (1568-1649), religious controversialist, imprisoned and tortured in 1630 for his seditious writings; John Lilburne (1614?-57), whipped, pilloried, and imprisoned in 1638 for printing and distributing unlicensed books; William Prynne (1600-69), religious and political

Far from being a dispassionate, impartial consideration of a new work, then, Smollett's review of the *Essay on Waters* evidently means to take up where his earlier notice of Lucas's *Appeal* had left off.

That Smollett intends to defame Lucas also finds expression in the ridicule directed at the *Essay's* rather fulsome dedicatory addresses to the Prince of Wales and Lord Chesterfield. "Such is his patriotic zeal", Smollett observes, "that even in this performance, his political principles seem to glow warmer than the waters of *Aken*", adding that "it is not impossible that the doctor studied medicine, on purpose to unite in his own person, the body-healer and the physician of the state".<sup>141</sup> Essentially an accurate observation, to be sure, but rather mean-spirited when we bear in mind that bombast of this sort was a matter of convention when it came to dedicatory essays. Smollett's assertions here might easily be used to characterize Johnson's numerous dedications to members of the peerage and the royal family. Indeed, Lucas's fustian language in the dedicatory addresses might very well be the most prominently orthodox aspect of the entire *Essay*.

Curiously, however, Lucas's bizarre attempt to employ the *Essay* as a vehicle to overhaul accepted orthographical practices elicits relatively tepid criticism. Lucas "offers his reasons in the preface for differing from all other authors, which indeed may be cohobated or concentrated into this one maxim", Smollett observes with more than a hint

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controversialist, imprisoned, pilloried, and tortured for his writings, 1633-34 (*DNB*, xi. 880-81, 1122-23; xvi. 432-33).

<sup>141</sup> *CR*, i. 344; for Lucas's address to Chesterfield see *Essay*, iii. ccix-ccxvii.

of parody, "namely, he holds himself wiser than all the rest of the world".<sup>142</sup> A few examples are given to illustrate Lucas's irrational spelling innovations, but on a point which might easily have unleashed a torrent of abuse, Smollett conducts himself with remarkable restraint.

Certainly the most significant aspect of Smollett's review are the charges of incompetence and deceitfulness leveled at Lucas, exemplified in the following passage:

notwithstanding all he has copied from *Hippocrates, Aristotle, Dioscorides, Celsus, Galen, Aretaeus, Vitruvius, Plinius, Cardanus, Trallianus, Platerus, Prosper Alpinus, Caelius Aurelianus, Avicenna, Paracelsus Bombast, Van Helmont, Boerhaave, Hoffman, Stahl, Homberg, Muschenbreck, Becher, Lister, Wallerius, Guidot, Floyer, Rowzee, Linden, Shaw*, and some more modern tracts which he has not thought proper to name, we will venture to pronounce him a true original.<sup>143</sup>

The basic point here is obvious enough: so heavily does Lucas borrow from existing works--and not all of this material is properly credited--that there is good reason to doubt whether there are any original observations in the *Essay* worth remarking on. What is not nearly so plain is that Smollett evidently means to accuse Lucas of filching from his own *Essay on the External Use of Water*, which is suggested by the allusion to "some more modern tracts which he has not thought proper to name".

The insinuation that Lucas plagiarized Smollett's earlier treatise is repeated elsewhere in the review. "We do not find any thing new in his account of the medicinal properties of simple water (page 166.)", Smollett observes in commenting on the first volume, "but we apprehend he has made free with *Boerhaave, Hoffman*, and some other

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<sup>142</sup> CR, i. 323.

authors of smaller account, to whom he has forgot to make proper acknowledgments".

Perhaps the most revelatory instance of Smollett's accusations can be found in the discussion of the third volume of Lucas's *Essay*:

The improvement of the baths which he so strenuously recommends, has been inculcated by repeated plans and proposals presented to the corporation of *Bath*; particularly by the late Mr. *Wood*, the architect, and Dr. *Cleland*, whose proposals have been constantly opposed by the faculty, and rejected by the corporation at *Bath*, with a species of rancour which Dr. *Lucas* would have construed into persecution. The candour of this curious chymist, would have therefore appeared more conspicuous, had he taken some notice of those gentlemen and others from whom he seems to have almost literally borrowed many of his most valuable hints of reformation. . . .<sup>144</sup>

It is important to note here that the proposals of Cleland and Wood are discussed at length in Smollett's earlier survey of the problems with the Bath spas. As far as Smollett is concerned, then, Lucas quite deliberately sought to pass off the work of others as his own--including most especially material presented in Smollett's own *Essay on Waters*.

Clearly it is Smollett's contempt for Lucas personally and professionally--and not any particular scientific fault with the *Essay* itself, or an ulterior desire to elevate the status of reviewing--that is behind the censorious disposition of the *Critical* notice. The earlier notice of the *Appeals to the Commons* shows that Smollett despised Lucas the politician. Lucas's evident plagiarism in writing up the *Essay on Waters* added a personal dimension to matters, intensifying further Smollett's existing opinion of Lucas as an unprincipled and clownish firebrand, eager to attract publicity at whatever cost. It is

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<sup>143</sup> CR, i. 322.

<sup>144</sup> CR, i. 341.

hardly surprising, then, to find Lucas portrayed in the *Critical* not as a competent though unexceptional researcher but as a buffoon: besotted with himself, prone to embrace patently foolish ideas, and a brazen pilferer of intellectual property who is richly deserving of the severest public rebukes.

Did Johnson consult Smollett's notice before writing his own review of Lucas's *Essay*? Almost certainly. Appearing with the Lucas piece in the May 1756 issue of the *Critical* is the review of Russell's *Natural History*, aspects of which, as we have seen, Johnson attempts to refute in the June 1756 number of the *Literary Magazine*. The May number of the *Critical* also carried a review of Charlotte Lennox's *Memoirs of the Countess of Berci*, which Johnson claims to have read in a letter to Lennox dated 30 July, two weeks before the appearance of his review of Lucas's *Essay*.<sup>145</sup> That Johnson reviews the *Essay* with Lucas's controversial reputation foremost in his mind becomes clear in his opening sentences, where a discussion of the work itself is put on hold while Lucas's public-spiritedness and moral courage are extolled. Johnson's assertiveness on this point is almost certainly calibrated to neutralize correspondingly strong prejudices against Lucas, which had recently found expression in Smollett's reviews of the *Appeal to the Commons* and the *Essay on Waters*:

The author of this book is a man well known to the world for his daring defiance of power when he thought it exerted on the side of wrong, the popularity which he obtained, and the violence to which the *Irish* ministers had recourse, that they might set themselves free from an opponent so restless by his principles, so powerful by his conduct, and so specious by his cause; they drove him from his native country by proclamation, in

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<sup>145</sup> See *Letters*, i. 136, and note 1.

which they charged him with crimes of which they never intended to be called to the proof, and oppressed him by methods equally irresistible by guilt and innocence. Let the man thus driven into exile for having been the friend of his country be received in every other place as a confessor of liberty, and let the tools of power be taught in time that they may rob but cannot impoverish.<sup>146</sup>

Lucas acted in the best interests of his fellow citizens, the government's case was willfully dishonest, and we should all celebrate the author of the *Essay on Waters* as an exemplar of the highest civic ideals. Johnson's own willingness to speak out against the wrongdoing of politicians is evident enough here. But what invests these remarks with even greater significance is that Johnson offers a spirited endorsement of the self-image Lucas himself sought to project in both the *Essay* and the earlier *Appeal*, neither of which made much headway in the public mind if the reviews of these works in the *Monthly* and *Critical* are any indication.<sup>147</sup>

In the next few sentences Johnson turns his attention to the *Essay* itself:

In the book which we are now to examine is treated one of the most important and general of all physical subjects, the nature and properties of a body justly numbered among the elements, without which neither animal nor vegetable life can subsist. This subject our author has examined with great diligence, not only by consulting writers, but by numerous and careful experiments, which he has tried upon more mineral springs, than perhaps any single man had ever examined.<sup>148</sup>

Perhaps in response to Lucas's fears of being widely thought of as a scientific quack, Johnson is careful to emphasize the erudition on display in the *Essay*. It is also possible that Johnson here means to rebut the charges of scholarly incompetence leveled at Lucas

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<sup>146</sup> *LM*, i. 167.

<sup>147</sup> *Boswell's Life*, i. 311; also see Sir Tanfield Leman's review of the *Appeal* in the *Monthly's* January 1756 issue (xiv. 76-78): here, Lucas is portrayed as a deluded and pompous controversialist.

in the *Critical*. Having said so much in Lucas's favor, however, Johnson is by no means reluctant to point out that the bizarre spelling innovations in the *Essay* undermine what are in fact Lucas's basically legitimate claims to scholarly respectability.

Lucas's zeal for orthographical reform should have been inhibited by Johnson's *Dictionary*, which had authoritatively addressed irregularities in English spelling when it appeared in April 1755. Yet Lucas presses ahead with his poorly conceived program anyway, anchoring his case in the presumption that the act of publishing one's writings in itself makes one a de facto orthographer: "Let then every writer propose his corrections and amendments of our stile and diction, to the public", Lucas declares, "without that religious, or rather blind, attachement to the authority of predecessors, with which some sensible men seem pinioned".<sup>149</sup> We can easily read Lucas's remarks here as a thinly veiled attack on Johnson's cautious, precedent-based approach to orthography in the *Dictionary*--"I have endeavoured to proceed with a scholar's reverence for antiquity", Johnson states in the "Preface"--so it is hardly surprising to find Johnson bluntly censuring Lucas on this point even though the review ultimately strives to help Lucas gain respectability in the public eye and to encourage a sympathetic reading of the *Essay*:

This author has been induced by an affected fondness for analogy and derivation, to disfigure his pages with new modes of spelling, which indeed gives his book a forbidding aspect, and may dispose many to conclude too hastily, that he has very little skill in questions of importance, who has so much leisure to lavish upon trifles. Every book, I suppose, is written to be read: the orthographical innovator very little consults his own interest, for I know few faults so likely to drive off the

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<sup>148</sup> *LM*, i. 167.

<sup>149</sup> Lucas, *Essay on Waters*, i. xxv-xxvii; also see Sledd and Kolb, *Johnson's Dictionary*, p. 33.

reader as perpetual and glaring affectation. He that studies singularity, should at least compensate that disgust which his disapprobation of custom naturally produces in all who follow it, by taking a better way than that which he leaves; he that despises the countenance of example should supply its place by the power of truth. But Dr. *Lucas's* changes are sometimes wrong upon his own principles. . . .<sup>150</sup>

Particularly in the third paragraph here, Johnson addresses readers not as a reviewer primarily but as an experienced orthographer reproving an incompetent amateur. A glance through the *Essay* reveals that Johnson's admonitions are very much in order. But it is also worth noting that Johnson's criticisms--pointed though they are--are blended into the review in a manner which minimizes their impact. Had Johnson not established beforehand the prevailing worthiness of Lucas's effort and thus set his spelling oddities in a proper perspective, readers might understandably--but in Johnson's view "too hastily"--conclude that such problems betray a general incompetence. Indeed, in an effort to encourage readers to think of the spelling problems as trivial, Johnson makes a point of asserting at the close of the review's critical portion--eighteen columns of extract stretched over two issues subsequent issues follow--that Lucas's orthographical blunders "do not lessen the usefulness of his book, though they may diminish the pleasure of perusing it".<sup>151</sup> Though let down by needless tampering with accepted spelling practices, Johnson argues here and in the review as a whole, the *Essay on Waters* will reward readers with its insightful observations on balneology.

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<sup>150</sup> *LM*, i. 167.

<sup>151</sup> *LM*, i. 167.



A word must be said about the eighteen columns of extract that conclude Johnson's review of the *Essay on Waters*. E. A. Bloom finds this portion of the review, as well as everything else Johnson says apart from his political and orthographical commentary, to be of negligible interest ("anticlimatic", is how Bloom puts the matter). Such a reading makes a certain amount of sense. Samuel Johnson's linguistic and political observations understandably interest modern scholars, while none but the most specialized scientific historian or antiquarian would read the review to learn more about Lucas's contribution to balneology. Plausible though it is, Bloom's position takes insufficient notice of the contemporary circumstances that give Johnson's review its force and coherence. After all, Johnson's chief aim is to win for a deserving but much maligned author a critical mass of readers, and all four parts of the review make inter-related and indispensable contributions to that end. The spirited defense of Lucas's political activities which begin the review are meant to redress his besmirched reputation. Having conditioned readers to read with an open mind if not sympathetically, Johnson then praises Lucas's scholarly thoroughness in the hopes of creating interest in the *Essay*. Indeed, Johnson's commentary on this point would make suitable material for today's dust jackets. The discussion of Lucas's orthography which follows contributes an aura of impartiality and scholarly rigor while defining the spelling problems as a subordinate issue. The extensive extracts come last and are intended to further whet the curiosity created by the preceding commentary, though here as elsewhere in Johnson's reviews--the Hales and Warton pieces come to mind--he occasionally endorses, qualifies, or questions

Lucas's method. Such remarks only deepen the analytical and even-handed character of the review. More significantly, Lucas in these instances is treated with dignity: we are left with the impression that *An Essay on Waters* makes stimulating reading even when one finds it necessary to disagree with this specific observation or that.<sup>152</sup>

The *Monthly's* assessment of the *Essay on Waters* appeared in August 1756 and like Johnson's, which was published two weeks earlier, acknowledges Lucas's diligence ("If industry may be admitted any part of a writer's merit" Lucas is entitled to "the favour of the public") and firmly but not uncharitably criticizes his orthographical excesses ("though they render him less agreeable, they do not make him less instructive"). Unlike Johnson, however, the *Monthly* reviewer demonstrates little sympathy for Lucas's embittered but largely justifiable defiance of critics and his nagging sense of social isolation. The "candid reader will be more offended at the asperity with which he treats those from whom he dissents", the reviewer declares.<sup>153</sup> Somewhat of a benighted remark perhaps, but certainly a tenable observation. Indeed, it would be proper to say that the *Monthly* offers a basically serviceable account of Lucas's *Essay*, as does the *Critical*. But the *Literary Magazine* review remains distinctive because Johnson manages to address the interests of both the author and the reading public without straying beyond what he sees as the proper bounds of contemporary criticism. Readers are given a well-informed and remarkably thorough introduction to a stimulating and at times politically and pedagogically controversial work. Lucas, meanwhile, is treated with every bit of the

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<sup>152</sup> *Grub Street*, p. 198.

respect his scientific attainments entitle him to, though Johnson refuses to tread lightly when it comes to the spelling affectations which blight an otherwise worthy treatise.

**Patrick Browne, *Natural History of Jamaica*:** reviewed 16 August 1756

(reviewed in the *Critical* June 1756; in the *Monthly* July and October 1756). Born in Ireland and educated at the University of Leyden where he obtained the degree of M.D. in 1743, Patrick Browne (1720-90) practiced medicine for two years in London before removing to Jamaica, where he spent ten years studying the island's natural features. What immediately impresses about Browne's *Natural History* are the references in the title page and prefatory essay to a non-existent section on Jamaica's climatology and diseases. Browne does in fact own up to the oversight, but for some reason his explanation is placed at the end of the work, on page 490, rather than on an errata slip or in a prominent place near the beginning where it belonged. "I would willingly have added the Three Dissertations I proposed to publish with this work", Browne declares:

but as it has already swelled to the limits I designed, and the season is too far advanced to finish the whole this year, I determined to publish the Civil and Natural History alone; leaving those, with another on Worm-fevers, &c. which will make a small volume in 8vo, to be printed the ensuing season.<sup>154</sup>

Writing for the *Critical Review*, Tobias Smollett is careful to make mention of the *Natural History*'s never-completed segment--

the third part which we should expect to be the most useful of the whole, is no where to be found, but in this paragraph [the preface] and the title

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<sup>153</sup> *MR*, xv. 205-08.

<sup>154</sup> Patrick Browne, *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (London, 1756), p. 490; for Browne's biography see *DNB*, iii. 53.

page, where it makes a considerable figure, and no doubt helped the doctor to the greater part of his subscribers. . . .<sup>155</sup>

--though not of Browne's apology. Indeed, if the remainder of the review is any indication the missing section raised doubts in Smollett's mind about Browne's basic competence as a scholar. A few sentences later, for example, we find Smollett reproaching Browne for his very slight misdating of Columbus's initial sighting of North America (he is off by one day) and for mistakenly claiming that the island that first came into Columbus's view was Hispaniola rather than St. Salavador. Elsewhere in the review, Browne is accused of duplicating the researches of Sir Hans Sloane, whose natural history of Jamaica and other Caribbean islands had appeared a generation or so earlier.<sup>156</sup> To be sure, Browne's insightfulness as a botanist and the quality of his accompanying illustrations are recognized in the closing paragraph, but at the end of the day Smollett cannot bring himself to endorse the *Natural History*:

On the whole, we can say in favour of this performance . . . that the plants are neatly engraved; and that the author may claim some merit among botanic writers: but, we cannot recommend it, as a compleat natural history; because we apprehend it deficient in the fossile productions of the island; contains no account of the trade-winds, the rainy season, the earthquakes, exhalations, or diseases of the climate; nor is it provided with a thermometrical table of the weather.<sup>157</sup>

Sir Tanfield Leman reached much the same conclusion in his review for the *Monthly*, though unlike Smollett Leman did manage to stumble across Browne's note on

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<sup>155</sup> CR, i. 391.

<sup>156</sup> CR, i. 391-92; Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), author of *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbadoes, Nieves, St. Christopher's, and Jamaica, with the Natural History of the last*, 2 vols., (London, 1707-25); for further information on Sloane see DNB, xviii. 379.

<sup>157</sup> CR, i. 409.

the missing chapter. In the second segment of his review (published eleven or so weeks after Johnson's) Leman acknowledges Browne's apology but levels charges of dishonesty nevertheless: "is this keeping his word with his subscribers? nay, is not every one who buys this book, upon the credit of its title-page, deceived in his purchase?", Leman declares. "In short, what would have been highly culpable in a jobbing bookseller, is more inexcusable in a scholar, and a gentleman".<sup>158</sup> Readers interested in subjects of this kind who happened to consult both leading review journals, then, likely would have come away with a very low opinion of Browne's volume.

Appearing in mid-August 1756, Johnson's review of Browne appears to have been chiefly designed to answer Smollett's criticisms of two months earlier. Take the lead sentences for instance, where Johnson is careful to point out that Browne's work is remarkably free from the kinds of scholarly sloppiness that disfigure, when they do not invalidate, most other natural histories:

NATURAL HISTORY was in former times so filled with fabulous narratives, that there is scarcely any part of knowledge in which less help has descended to us from our ancestors; and the desire of relating something wonderful has at all times prevailed so much on physiologists, that they have with too much readiness adopted the tales of the vulgar, and, with too much credulity admitted the testimonies of such as observe grossly or relate inaccurately. From this fault Dr. *Browne* seems to be more free than most other writers, and therefore they who look rather for amusement than truth may perhaps find themselves disappointed.<sup>159</sup>

One wonders if it is possible to write a more resourceful vindication of Browne from charges of dullness and fraudulence. Given the temptations to exaggerate one's findings--

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<sup>158</sup> *MR*, xv. 344.

the impossibility of refutation; the universal appeal of fantastical observations--natural history has proved to be a notoriously unreliable field, Johnson argues here. Browne is thus to be commended for sticking to the truth even though he almost certainly writes in the knowledge that many readers--accustomed as they are to finding "amusement [rather] than truth" in natural histories--may reject his work because it departs sharply from the disreputable practices of most other authors who write in this genre.

Johnson develops this point in the next sentence when he calls attention to the eye-witness authenticity of Browne's account. Of particular interest is the reference to Hans Sloane, which is made here, evidently, with the intent of refuting Smollett's claim that Browne pointlessly duplicates the work of his renowned predecessor. "How much he has added to the history of Sir *Hans Sloane* we are not able to tell, having not compared them", Johnson declares, "but [we] have reason to believe that he has generally trusted his own eyes, and then, though he should have discovered no new animals or vegetables, his book is still useful, as the accounts of two observers necessarily illustrate one another". Browne's *Natural History* does indeed fill a legitimate scholarly niche, we are thus led to believe.<sup>160</sup>

As the critical portion of the review draws to a close, Johnson persists in offering appreciative interpretations of what are described in the *Critical* as instances of Browne's incompetence. Browne's failure to limit his discussion to novel aspects of Jamaican life, for example, is portrayed by Johnson as a net benefit to readers: "we are very far from

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<sup>159</sup> *LM*, i. 176.

intending to insinuate" that Browne "has added nothing" to our knowledge of Jamaica, Johnson asserts. True enough, Browne's natural history often reflects what is best described as an "unnecessary diligence. He has described many products of *Jamaica* which are equally to be found in other parts, perhaps in every part of the known world". But overzealousness of this kind ultimately amounts to a venial rather than a grave failing, Johnson adds, because "every man is fond of the country that he inhabits, and is willing to multiply its products, and celebrate its fertility". Even in the choice of extracts which conclude the review we find Johnson working to counterbalance the dismissive commentary published in the *Critical*. Unlike Smollett, who quotes from the least attractive portions of Browne's work, Johnson chooses the more interesting passages from the *Natural History*. In "the account of any country, those things should be selected, that are peculiar to it, that are distinguished by some permanent and natural difference from the same species in other places", Johnson says by way of introduction to the nineteen columns of extract which conclude the review. "Upon these principles we have extracted the following particulars without intending to prefer them to many others, for which we have no room". The *Natural History* contains plenty of meritorious observations, Johnson attempts to demonstrate here, even though Browne occasionally offers more information than most readers might want.<sup>161</sup>

It is worth conjecturing for a moment on why Johnson avoids discussing Browne's missing section. The representative nature of Johnson's citations--as well as his habit of

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<sup>160</sup> *LM*, i. 176.

scrutinizing prefaces--suggest that he knew of both the non-existent section and Browne's apology for it.<sup>162</sup> Solid evidence is lacking, but one likely possibility is that Johnson accepted Browne's apology on account of his forthright--though clumsily placed--acknowledgment of the error and, more importantly, because the omissions were in some measure beyond Browne's control, the weather and marketplace considerations being the chief factors in this case rather than incompetence or sloth. Johnson may also have believed that Browne had already received more than his share of abuse at the hands of the *Critical*.

**Richard Lovett, *The Subtil Medium Proved*:** reviewed 15 September 1756 (reviewed in the *Monthly* December 1756). A lay cleric at Worcester Cathedral from 1722 until his death, Richard Lovett (1692-1780) also authored a handful of treatises on electricity, thus exemplifying the burgeoning interest in scientific experimentation during the eighteenth century amongst both occasional projectors and serious scholars alike.<sup>163</sup> How the *Subtil Medium* came to Johnson's attention is not known. It was not reviewed previously in the two leading review journals, nor does it appear that Johnson knew Lovett or his co-publishers John Hinton and William Sandby. Johnson's public and private writings reveal a keen and intelligent interest in ground-breaking developments in the physical sciences--particularly electricity, as Richard Schwartz and William K. Wimsatt have shown--so it is not hard to imagine him being moved to consult the *Subtil*

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<sup>161</sup> *LM*, i. 176.

<sup>162</sup> See Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 53.



*Medium* after reading an advertisement for the work, or hearing of it through casual conversation.<sup>164</sup>

Johnson's review comprises a half-dozen sentences of critical commentary, which are quoted here, followed by five columns of extract.

ELECTRICITY is the great discovery of the present age, and the great object of philosophical curiosity. It is perhaps designed by providence for the excitement of human industry, that the qualities of bodies should be discovered gradually from time to time. How many wonders may yet lie hid in every particle of matter no man can determine. The power of Electricity is sufficient to shew us that nature is far from being exhausted, and that we have yet much to do before we shall be fully acquainted with the properties of these things which are always in our hands and before our eyes. The writer of this pamphlet pretends not to learning, but he seems at least to be diligent in his enquiries, and faithful in his relations. The main works we shall perhaps not examine, but we exhibit here his introduction which contains a history of Electricity that may give some entertainment to those who are not yet much versed in philosophical studies.<sup>165</sup>

Perhaps it would be correct for us to conclude that Johnson is much more interested in electricity as a concept than he is in the specifics of Lovett's book. Even so, we should not forget that it is Lovett's investigations that spark the eloquent observations on scientific inquiry here--Johnson's review of Hoadly and Wilson's *Electrical Experiments* is uninspired by comparison--and that on the whole Lovett would have had little reason to bemoan his reception in the *Literary Magazine*. Indeed, a survey of Lovett's preface demonstrates that the Lovett review very much conforms to the *Literary Magazine's*

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<sup>163</sup> See E. J. Holmyard, "Science, Mathematics, and Astronomy", *Johnson's England*, ii. 253-59; G. S. Rousseau, "Science Books and Their Readers in the Eighteenth Century", *Books and Their Readers*, pp. 197-255; for a biographical note on Lovett see *DNB*, xii. 178.

<sup>164</sup> Wimsatt, "Johnson on Electricity", *Review of English Studies* xxiii (1947), 257-60; Schwartz, *New Science*, pp. 14-24, chapter two and passim.

<sup>165</sup> *LM*, i. 232.

prefatory pledge to advance the interests of worthy authors and to alert book buyers to the recent availability of meritorious titles.

Lovett's preface is conventional in essential matters of form: the occasion for the work is discussed, readers are introduced to the topics addressed in the volume, issues of scholarly methodology are considered, and so forth. Relevant here is the mention made of Lovett's overarching aim, which is to inspire a wider interest in the practical aspects of electrical experimentation, the traditional view of electricity as "of so abstruse a Nature, as to be scarce explicable on any rational Principles whatsoever" being no longer valid if the experiments set forth in the *Subtil Medium* are any indication. Also of note in the preface is Lovett's frank self-assessment. Readers are asked to forgive the author's sporadic grammatical mistakes and his paltry knowledge of Greek and Latin. Elsewhere in the preface Lovett admits that the *Subtil Medium* contains "some Things which may appear a little heterodox, and something different from certain Philosophical Points, which, for a considerable Time past, have been settled, as undeniable, by the greatest Philosophers". But such should not put off readers, Lovett adds, if only because the scholarly rigor on display here and the potential significance of the subject matter entitle the *Subtil Medium* to a "fair" and "candid" "Hearing" in the marketplace.<sup>166</sup>

In what manner does the *Subtil Medium's* prefatory essay bear on the *Literary Magazine* piece? The first four sentences of Johnson's review can be read as a solid endorsement of Lovett's call for further attempts to determine the properties of electricity.

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<sup>166</sup> Richard Lovett, *The Subtil Medium Prov'd* (London, 1756), "To the Reader".

Lovett is on the mark, Johnson suggests here, when he argues that the boundaries of electrical experimentation--especially its practical applications--have yet to be reached. Johnson's remark about Lovett's scholarly trustworthiness ("he seems at least to be diligent in his enquiries, and faithful in his relations"), meanwhile, addresses Lovett's worry that the absence of learned terminology might foster unwarranted doubts about his competence as a projector--hardly a minor point when we recall that being a projector in the eighteenth century did not presumptively command the esteem of contemporaries, as Johnson's *Adventurer* 99 (1753) points out.<sup>167</sup> Also worth noting are the five columns of extract, which are drawn from Lovett's prefatory account of the history of electrical experimentation rather than from the main body of the work because, as Johnson says, it is hoped that the review will arouse interest in the *Subtil Medium* amongst "those who are not yet much versed in philosophical studies".<sup>168</sup> Lovett's prefatory history is successful enough in conveying the drama of what was in 1756 an emerging field of scientific inquiry (e.g., "This sudden and wonderful discovery", Lovett writes as he describes an experiment performed in 1746, "amazed the whole European world for some time"), but what gives the extract a much greater impact is its relation to Johnson's eloquent commentary on physico-theology which precedes it.<sup>169</sup> What the review ultimately amounts to, in other words, is a deftly executed philosophical essay on electricity, co-authored by Johnson and Lovett. Johnson interprets the humanistic and theological

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<sup>167</sup> Also see Rousseau, "Science Books and Their Readers", passim; Schwartz, *New Science*, chapter two.

<sup>168</sup> *LM*, i. 232; Johnson quotes the entire introductory essay of the *Subtil Medium*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>169</sup> *LM*, i. 233; Lovett, *Subtil Medium*, p. 4.

significance behind the recent headline-grabbing experiments in electricity, while Lovett provides the necessary historical context.<sup>170</sup>

The *Monthly's* three-page notice of Lovett's treatise hardly qualifies as impartial or even as particularly discerning criticism. As Lovett himself would put the matter two years later in his rebuttal to the journal, The *Subtil Medium* was quite unfairly "knock'd o'the Head by the *Monthly Review*".<sup>171</sup> The reviewer--perhaps John Berkenhout--begins by rebuking the *Subtil Medium's* needlessly prolix sub-title (157 words) and Lovett's unscholarly idiom. "Mr. Lovett has saved us the trouble of telling the Reader what he may expect to meet with in this pamphlet, the above title being a compendious Epitome of the whole performance. It will also be sufficient to apprise" readers, the reviewer continues, "that whatever discoveries may be contained in it, they are not delivered in a very elegant style". These are essentially legitimate observations, of course, but rather superficial, and in the case of Lovett's style unwarranted as well given Lovett's own remarks on the matter in the prefatory note (which the reviewer quotes). Berkenhout does make mention of Lovett's "candour and sincerity", and a word of praise, however grudging, is said on behalf of Lovett's illuminating discussion of the medical applications of electricity. But ultimately Lovett is portrayed as a well-meaning but eccentric dabbler who, almost in spite of himself, has managed to make a useful observation or two on

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<sup>170</sup> For an overview of electrical experimentation in the first half of the century see Holmyard, "Science", *Johnson's England*, ii. 253-59.

<sup>171</sup> Lovett, *Sir Isaac Newton's Aether Realized . . . in Answer to the ANIMADVERSION made by the MONTHLY REVIEW* (London, 1758), p. 3; also see Roger Lonsdale, "William Bewley and *The Monthly Review*: A Problem of Attribution", *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* lv (1961), 309-318.

electricity and medicine. The *Subtil Medium* "may, at least, be of as much advantage to Society as many others that are written in a more scientific, and more elegant manner", Berkenhout declares. Even so, Lovett is plainly ignorant "of the common principles of the Newtonian Philosophy; and, consequently, but indifferently qualified to account for the many surprising Phaenomena of Electricity".<sup>172</sup>

Reviewing Lovett's work amounts to a minor affair for both the *Literary Magazine* and the *Monthly*, but the differences between the two commentaries are instructive nevertheless. Johnson would never dwell on shortcomings admitted to in the preface as his counterpart does here. Nor would Johnson bother to criticize a detailed, accurate, though perhaps overly-long title page, a feature which many prospective book buyers may have viewed as advantageous in any case. More significantly, Johnson's review can stand alone as an intellectually weighty yet widely accessible essay on an emerging field of knowledge.

**Elizabeth Harrison, *Miscellanies on Moral and Religious Subjects*:** reviewed 15 October 1756 (reviewed in the *Monthly* November 1756). Johnson subscribed to the privately printed *Miscellanies*, so it is not much of a surprise to find him writing favorably of the work in the *Literary Magazine* even though his praise is characteristically provisional. It is noted, for instance, that the contributing authors "attempt to employ the ornaments of romance in the decoration of religion [emphasis added]", and that they "have laboured" to infuse their narratives with "brightness of

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Lonsdale suggests that John Berkenhout may have written at least some of the reviews attributed by B. C.

imagery" and "purity of sentiment". Also of interest in the review is Johnson's observation that the *Miscellanies* "will not be generally read" because it is "published only for the subscribers", a circumstance which may have prompted readers to wonder why Johnson devotes considerable space--at twelve columns the Harrison review is one of Johnson's longest--to a work not widely available. It is impossible to do more than make educated guesses on this point, but one plausible explanation is that Johnson simply admired the moral sense of the contributing authors and sought to award them their due mead of favorable publicity. The inclusion of extensive extracts, moreover, may have been a deliberate attempt to highlight what Johnson saw as the proper ends of fiction at an historical moment when scandalous "secret histories", bawdy poems, and similar sorts of material were regularly given notice in the *Monthly* and the *Critical*, even though such reviews are almost invariably condemnatory.

The review opens with an ambitious comparison of Harrison's contributors to Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and Elizabeth Rowe (1674-1737), two dissenters whose writings enjoyed great popularity during the first half of the century.<sup>173</sup> "The authors of the essays in prose seem generally to have imitated or tried to imitate the copiousness and luxuriance of Mrs. Rowe", Johnson states. The contributing poets, meanwhile, "have had Dr. Watts before their eyes, a writer who, if he stood not in the first class of genius,

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Nangle to Bewley that were published between 1755-67.

<sup>172</sup> *MR*, xv. 561-62.

<sup>173</sup> *DNB*, xvii. 338-39; xx. 978-81.

compensated that defect by a ready application of his powers to the promotion of piety".<sup>174</sup> Johnson then proceeds to briefly survey the history of religion-centered fiction.

The attempt to employ the ornaments of romance in the decoration of religion was, I think, first made by Mr. *Boyle's Martyrdom of Theodora*, but *Boyle's* philosophical studies did not allow him time for the cultivation of stile, and the completion of the great design reserved for Mrs. *Rowe*. Dr. *Watts* was one of the first who taught the dissenters to write and speak like other men, by shewing them that elegance might consist with piety. They would have both done honour to a better society, for they had that charity which might well make their failings forgotten, and with which the whole christian world might wish for communion.<sup>175</sup>

Johnson goes on to assert that the enduring fame of Watts and Rowe is the legitimate expectation of all "writers who please and do not corrupt, who instruct and do not weary".<sup>176</sup> To lend weight to his point that Harrison's contributors exemplify the noblest traditions of fiction, Johnson devotes a great deal of space--eleven columns altogether, or roughly twice the size of the review of Blackwell's *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus*--to extracts. The first piece is a letter from a man who writes to a woman from beyond the grave, telling her to "turn your thoughts from this lifeless clay, and that dark and silent grave wherein it is interred, to these blissful realms, at which my more noble part is safely arrived". The second piece quoted is an exemplum on the duty of charity and its ennobling qualities. Two poems included in the extract are entitled, "Truth's Answer to a

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<sup>174</sup> *LM*, i. 282; cf. Johnson's "Life of Watts": "His lines are commonly smooth and easy, and his thoughts always religiously pure; but who is there that, to so much piety and innocence, does not wish for a greater measure of spriteliness and vigour? He is at least one of the few poets with whom youth and ignorance may be safely pleased; and happy will be that reader whose mind is disposed by his verses or his prose to imitate him in all but his non-conformity, to copy his benevolence to man, and his reverence to God" (*Lives*, iii. 311); Watts was included in the *Lives* at Johnson's request (*Lives*, iii. 302).

<sup>175</sup> *LM*, i. 282.

<sup>176</sup> *LM*, i. 282.

Man's Enquiry", and "Virtue and Vice".<sup>177</sup> Clearly the Harrison review reflects Johnson's intense religious feeling, but it also encapsulates Johnson's general outlook on the high moral seriousness of even the lower forms of fiction. The worthy material quoted in Johnson's review, in other words, is meant to stand in direct contrast to the silly, licentious, and often badly written familiar histories, petty verse, and so forth, regularly given notice in the "Monthly Catalogue" sections of the two leading review journals.

One interesting aspect of the review is Johnson's conspicuous silence with regard to the occasion for the work, the project being undertaken to raise funds for the care of Harrison's aging and ill father.<sup>178</sup> Why Johnson eschewed comment on this matter is open to conjecture. He may have surmised that appeals to leniency or pity would overshadow the considerable merit of the *Miscellanies*; perhaps he suspected that such remarks would evoke public cynicism rather than goodwill. It is also possible that, with the work not being widely available, there simply was no point in discussing its publication circumstances. The *Monthly's* review of the *Miscellanies* suggests that Johnson was well advised to keep the review on a strictly literary level. The reviewer--possibly John Berkenhout--takes into account Harrison's difficulties, but does so in a particularly ham-handed fashion:

As the publication is the work of benevolence, and a sacrifice, not to vanity, but to PIOUS OLD AGE, and INDUSTRIOUS POVERTY; it has a natural claim upon us, to an entire exemption from any criticism that might tend, in the least, to obstruct the progress of so worthy an intention.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> *LM*, i. 282-88.

<sup>178</sup> See *Miscellanies on Moral and Religious Subjects in Prose and Verse* (London, 1756), p. iii.

<sup>179</sup> *MR*, xv. 537.



The *Monthly's* self-congratulation here is obvious enough, but what about the worthiness of the *Miscellanies* itself? Are we to read the comments here as a bit of paralipsis?

Lucky for Harrison, in other words, that her circumstances evoke compassion. Or is the reviewer merely a clumsy rhetorician who really does mean to encourage a sympathetic reading of the work? Either way, it is difficult to imagine that this review pleased Harrison, her contributors, or her subscribers.

**Jonas Hanway, *A Journal of Eight Days' Journey, to which is added an Essay on Tea*:** reviewed 17 May 1757; Johnson's response to Hanway's 26 May riposte in the *Daily Gazetteer* published 17 June (the *Journal* was reviewed in the *Critical* July 1757; in the *Monthly* July 1757).<sup>180</sup> A merchant known for his philanthropy and his prolific writings on subjects ranging from British trade with Arab nations to pressing domestic social concerns, Jonas Hanway (1712-86) also achieved a measure of fame in his day for bringing into fashion the use of the umbrella.<sup>181</sup> Hanway's 723-page *Journal* is best understood as an epistolary travel narrative interspersed with reflections of differing lengths on various subjects. The first of its two volumes amounts to a rather humdrum miscellany of historical, philosophical, and religious essays on topics ranging from "buildings and nunneries" to "Reflections on the vanity of life". The second volume is given over to a consideration of the tea trade, and what commands attention here is the breathtaking hubris of Hanway's proposals. The "Essay on Tea" is meant to provide a

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<sup>180</sup> Extracts from the first edition of the *Journal* had been given in the Nov 1756 issue of the *LM* (Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 65-66).

<sup>181</sup> See *DNB*, viii. 1196-99.

justification for a massive shift not only in public policy--especially in regard to tax, trade, and monetary laws--but also in social norms as well: witness Hanway's bizarre declaration in "letter twenty-one" that if matters were left to him he "would abolish the custom of *sipping*" and allow "no liquids used hotter than they could be drank, in small quantities, without the least pain; and they should always be *drank*, except when they were eaten as soop mixed with *bread*, or other consistency".<sup>182</sup>

The *Literary Magazine* piece is best remembered nowadays for Johnson's mirthful observations on tea-drinking--Hanway is to expect "little justice from the author of this extract, a hardened and shameless tea-drinker". But it is also important to recall that the controversies ignited by the review contributed in some way to Johnson's departure from the *Literary Magazine*. At one point in the review Johnson happened to remark on the inadequate religious instruction at the Foundling Hospital, which Hanway generously supported:

I know not upon what observation Mr. *Hanway* founds his confidence in the governors of the *Foundling Hospital*, men of whom I have not any knowledge, but whom I intreat to consider a little the minds as well as bodies of the children. I am inclined to believe irreligion equally pernicious with gin and tea, and therefore think it not unseasonable to mention, that when a few months ago I wandered through the hospital, I found not a child that seemed to have heard of his creed or the commandments. To breed up children in this manner, is to rescue them from an early grave, that they may find employment for the gibbet; from dying in innocence, that they may perish by their crimes.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Jonas Hanway, *A Journal of Eight Days Journey in Sixty-Four Letters, to which is added an Essay on Tea in Thirty-two Letters* (London, 1757), i. 22-24, 211-25; ii. 155-78, 221-22, 223-55, 270-88.

<sup>183</sup> *LM*, ii. 167 (misnumbered 166).

The *London Chronicle* reprinted Johnson's observations here, and threats of libel soon followed. Johnson's reply in the *Literary Magazine* to Hanway's published response to the review disprove charges of dishonesty or malice. Even so, the owners of the *Literary Magazine* apparently concluded that, having had enough already of Johnson's incendiary anti-war essays, the time had finally come for him to hand in his resignation.<sup>184</sup> Eye-catching circumstances that they are, the aside on tea-drinking and the Foundling Hospital controversy have encouraged Johnsonian scholars to dwell on either the humorous or the censorious aspects of the review. Bloom, Boswell, and Eddy, for instance, interpret the tea-drinking commentary as a witty interlude between Johnson's otherwise unrelentingly sharp criticisms of Hanway's book. Robert DeMaria, meanwhile, finds a streak of testiness in the remark about tea. "Jonas Hanway arouses Johnson's anger", DeMaria observes, "partly by giving useless, unfounded advice on the imaginary economic and physical evils of tea-drinking", and also because Hanway advocates what Johnson sees as a needlessly "prudish reduction in the small stock of innocent human enjoyment". These readings are tenable but they seem to disregard Johnson's basically appreciative intentions. What the Hanway review amounts to, in fact, is a sympathetic treatment of an author whose altruistic objectives are thwarted by an overly sanguine understanding of his competence as a social critic.<sup>185</sup>

True, Johnson does criticize Hanway's unpolished prose and his at times facile analysis. But equally true is that Hanway is given ample credit for attempting to grapple

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<sup>184</sup> For an overview of the Hanway incident see Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 184-86.

with England's troubled civic culture. If Hanway's "character may be estimated by his book", Johnson declares in the first paragraph, "he is a man whose failings may well be pardoned for his virtues". As if to make certain that readers admire Hanway personally even though his treatise may disappoint, in the second paragraph Johnson is careful to soften criticisms of Hanway's style with praise for his benevolence. "We wish indeed, that among other corrections he had submitted his pages to the inspections of a grammarian", Johnson states, "but with us to mean well is a degree of merit which overbalances much greater errors than impurity of stile".<sup>186</sup> Elsewhere in the review Johnson acknowledges the underlying legitimacy of Hanway's outlook on England's contemporary social ailments, though Hanway's attempt to blame tea-drinking for various disorders is rejected out of hand:

Of these dreadful effects, some are perhaps imaginary, and some have another cause. . . . That the diseases commonly called nervous, tremours, fits, habitual depression, and all the maladies which proceed from laxity and debility, are more frequent than in any former time, is, I believe, true, however deplorable. But this new race of evils, will not be expelled by the prohibition of tea. This general languor is the effect of general luxury, of general idleness. If it be most to be found among tea drinkers, the reason is that tea is one of the stated amusements of the idle and the luxurious.<sup>187</sup>

Hanway is right to ponder the social and medical ramifications of the mass craving for luxury nowadays, Johnson suggests here, but the solutions to these problems are far more complicated or elusive than Hanway is perhaps capable of comprehending. Significantly, Johnson might easily have resorted to sarcasm or searing censure in discussing Hanway's

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<sup>185</sup> *LM*, ii. 162 (misnumbered 161); *Boswell's Life*, i. 313; Bloom, *Grub Street*, p. 199-200; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 11-15, 92; DeMaria, *Life*, pp. 186-87.

<sup>186</sup> *LM*, ii. 162 (misnumbered 161).

simple-minded analysis--much as he does in the Blackwell and Jenyns pieces--but he chooses instead to treat Hanway with remarkable charity.

Johnson can be said to go beyond mere politeness, however, on the few occasions when Hanway is made out to be a much better writer and thinker than the *Journal* on the whole would have us believe. Johnson offers a judiciously abridged version of the third "letter" of the *Journal*'s second volume, for instance, which is described as a "truly curious" survey of the "rise and progress of tea-drinking".<sup>187</sup> Hanway's denunciation of gin-drinking, meanwhile, receives a rousing endorsement, and it is worth noting that on the one issue where the *Journal* is compellingly persuasive, Johnson quotes Hanway's argument in its entirety:

From tea the writer digresses to spirituous liquors, about which he will have no controversy with the *Literary Magazine*, we shall therefore insert almost his whole letter, and add to it one testimony, that the mischiefs arising on every side from this compendious mode of drunkenness, are enormous and insupportable; equally to be found among the great and the mean; filling palaces with disquiet and distraction, harder to be born, as it cannot be mentioned; and overwhelming multitudes with incurable diseases and unpitied poverty.<sup>188</sup>

Interestingly, the closing paragraphs of the review betray an ambivalence in Johnson toward the position he stakes out earlier. We are left with the impression that Johnson--in spite of his assumptions about the harmlessness of tea and the prevailing dim-wittedness of Hanway's analysis--finds common ground with Hanway when it comes to the economics of the tea trade. Hanway rightly points out that tea-drinking has left

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<sup>187</sup> *LM*, ii. 163.

<sup>188</sup> *LM*, ii. 162-63; Hanway, *Journal*, ii. 20-24.

<sup>189</sup> *LM*, ii. 164; cf. Hanway, *Journal*, ii. 142-48.

England with an unfavorable balance of trade with China, Johnson avers, though Hanway is not quite consistent when he refuses to lay some of the blame for the ills of tea-drinking with the East India company. If "Mr. *Hanway's* computation" of the trade with China "be just", Johnson declares, then the "importation" of tea--and not merely "the use of it"--"ought at once to be stopped by a penal law".<sup>190</sup>

On a related point, Johnson asserts that Hanway concedes more than he should to the opposition when he admits that tax revenues from the tea industry are a boon to the nation's treasury. "The author allows one slight argument in favour of tea, which, in my opinion, might be with far greater justice urged, both against that, and many other parts of our naval trade". To begin with, the money raised by a levy on tea cannot be said to deter luxury--itself a dubious employment of tax law, Johnson suggests--because the poor love tea no less than do the rich. And in any case imposing a tax on a universally popular commodity encourages black-marketeering. But of much greater significance is the loss of life attendant on the tea trade. Of the roughly 600 sailors employed in the China tea trade, Johnson observes:

I am told, that sometimes half, commonly a third part perish in the voyage; so that instead of setting this navigation against the inconveniences already alleged, we may add to them, the yearly loss of two hundred men in the prime of life, and reckon, that the trade to *China* has destroyed ten thousand men since the beginning of this century. If tea be thus pernicious, if it impoverishes our country, if it raises temptation, and gives opportunity to illicit commerce, which I have always looked upon as one of the strongest evidences of the inefficacy of our law, the weakness of our

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<sup>190</sup> *LM*, ii. 166; for Hanway's exoneration of the East India company in regard to the evils of tea-drinking see *Journal*, ii. 179-82; the economic and political views expressed in the Hanway review are consistent with Johnson's broader outlook on these subjects: see Greene, *Politics*, pp. 284-85; Middendorf, "Johnson on Wealth and Commerce".

government, and the corruption of our people, let us at once resolve to prohibit it for ever.<sup>191</sup>

What follows is a list of the many philanthropic projects which Hanway claims might easily be financed by the money currently spent on the tea industry: "public gardens"; "paving and widening of streets"; "rendering *rivers* navigable"; building "neat and convenient *houses*, where are now only *huts*"; "*draining* lands". A deeply compassionate man, Johnson could not help but assent to Hanway's impassioned if somewhat implausible argument. "Our riches would be much better employed to these purposes", Johnson declares in his closing sentence, "but if this project does not please, let us first resolve to save our money, and we shall afterwards very easily find ways to spend it".<sup>192</sup> Perhaps reluctantly, Johnson is led to conclude that Hanway may be right in arguing that England's robust appetite for tea comes with a measure of social and economic hazard, though it is also suggested here that tea-drinkers themselves--and not government ministers, whose calculations will prove to be self-interested rather than philanthropic--must decide whether to abstain or not. Clearly, Johnson discerned an essential worthiness in Hanway's *Journal*. Many of Hanway's specific claims are risible in themselves--tea's effect on the genetic fitness of the English people, for instance--but one or two of his observations are insightful, or at least stimulating, and the *Journal* on the whole deserves recognition, if only for the praiseworthy moral sensibility it displays.

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<sup>191</sup> *LM*, ii. 166-67.

<sup>192</sup> *LM*, ii. 167; cf. Hanway, *Journal*, ii. 189.

Somewhat surprisingly, Hanway responded to Johnson's kind-hearted review with an imperious, menacing, and rather foolish riposte in the *Daily Gazetteer*. No copy of the 26 May issue of the *Gazetteer* is known to have survived, but Johnson's reply in the June number of the *Literary Magazine* tells us a great deal about the contents of Hanway's letter. Hanway evidently censured Johnson for his general insolence--"see the fate of ignorant temerity! I now find, but find too late, that . . . I have irritated an important member of an important corporation; a man who, as he tells us in his letters, puts horses to his chariot"--before specifying the grounds on which charges of libel could be brought: "I am asked, whether I meant to *satirize* the man or *criticise* the writer"; "I am yet charged more heavily for having said, that *he has no intention to find any thing right at home*"; the observations on the Foundling Hospital were made "with folly and malice". It also seems that Hanway concluded with a vague but strongly worded threat: Hanway "advises me to consult my safety when I talk of corporations".<sup>193</sup> Taken together, Hanway's letter and Johnson's rebuttal are significant on two counts. The episode not only sheds light on Johnson's talents as a reviewer--doubtless Hanway's resentment was inspired at some level by the intelligence of Johnson's commentary--but it also validates Johnson's general observations on the contemporary hazards of authorship. By everyone's reckoning Hanway was a decent, affable man who justly acquired no small measure of public esteem on account of his philanthropic activity. Yet such was Hanway's sense of vulnerability to an unfavorable book review, and to such an extent was

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<sup>193</sup> *LM*, ii. 254-55; also see Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 78.



his self-regard exaggerated by the marketplace's capacity to confer celebrity, that Johnson's commentary--hardly adulatory but unquestionably fair-minded--elicited from Hanway an uncharacteristic malevolence. It is possible that Hanway came to recognize Johnson's evenhandedness if his conspicuous silence in the weeks following far less charitable notices of his work in the two leading review journals is any indication.

Johnson's remarkably sympathetic review is indeed set in relief by the reception of the *Journal* in the *Critical*. Quite unlike Johnson, for instance, the reviewer for the *Critical* dwells on the vapid aspects of the *Journal* while Hanway's benevolent intentions are underplayed. Hanway "should have consider'd, that there are some truths which every mortal is as well acquainted with as himself, and which it is therefore quite unnecessary to obtrude upon the public", the reviewer declares:

such are the trite and vulgar topics of morality, which, however just, are yet extremely insipid, when they come recommended by no elegance of style, enforc'd by no strength of argument, and embellished by no graces of the imagination. If this be the case, we apprehend that little entertainment or instruction can be gathered from that extravagant profusion of reflections, with which Mr. H\_\_\_'s work abounds, and which are in truth as hackney'd and as beaten as the road from Portsmouth to Kingston-upon-Thames.<sup>194</sup>

Brief mention is made of Hanway's philanthropic intentions, true enough, but this mite of kindness is swept away by the final verdict. Hanway's "humanity and worth", the reviewer declares, are "discredited" by a "total want of that distinguishing taste which might enable him to become acquainted with the nature of his own talents, and to select

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<sup>194</sup> CR, iv. 2.

such materials as might be proper for the inspection of the public".<sup>195</sup> It is important to note that Johnson and the reviewer for the *Critical* agree on the essentials: the *Journal* fails to live up to its commendable objectives thanks to Hanway's maladroitness and crude style. What each reviewer chooses to emphasize, however, speaks volumes about their attitudes toward authors and the role of reviewing. Hanway's altruism entitles him to a sympathetic review from Johnson in spite of the *Journal's* intellectual flimsiness. By contrast, the *Critical* sees little reason to do more than sneer at Hanway's bungling commentary.

The *Journal of Eight Days Journey* was reviewed in the *Monthly* by the then twenty-nine-year-old Oliver Goldsmith, who in joining Ralph Griffiths's staff a few months earlier had inaugurated his career as a professional author.<sup>196</sup> In terms of critical efficiency and impartiality, Goldsmith's is as good a review as one is likely to find in the major journals of the period. Equally significant is that Goldsmith and Johnson are in basic agreement in their survey of the strengths and imperfections of Hanway's work. Like Johnson, for instance, Goldsmith refrains from harping on the *Journal's* prevailing fatuity and instead emphasizes the considerable gap between the nobility of Hanway's objectives and the vacuousness of his commentary. Hanway "takes every opportunity (and sometimes forces one) to indulge his propensity to moralizing", Goldsmith observes, and in "this capacity, indeed, he shews great goodness of heart, and an earnest concern for the welfare of his country". Unfortunately, Hanway is manifestly incapable of

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<sup>195</sup> CR, iv. 7.

transfiguring his worthy intentions into an engrossing narrative. "Novelty of thought, and elegance of expression", Goldsmith declares, "cannot be reckoned among the excellencies of this Gentleman; who generally enforces his opinions by arguments rather obvious than new, and that convey more conviction than pleasure to the Reader".<sup>197</sup>

Another similarity between the *Monthly* piece and its predecessor in the *Literary Magazine* is that Goldsmith pays relatively little attention to the miscellaneous reflections of the *Journal's* first volume and devotes the lion's share of the review instead to a discussion of the controversial second volume. Predictably, Hanway's willingness to ascribe almost every major physical malady to excessive tea-drinking is politely yet unequivocally dismissed, and here it is worth noting that Goldsmith the practicing physician (Bachelor of Medicine, Trinity College, 1756) steps forward to present an interesting contrast to Johnson, whose personal fondness for tea-drinking brought forth a humorous rather than a grave response. When Hanway "treats of Tea in his assumed medical capacity", says Goldsmith:

he speaks by no means like an adept in physic: indeed it is not to be expected, that every Gentleman can be acquainted with a science that requires so much time and industry in the acquisition, and therefore we may forgive his errors without pointing them out: but if to be unacquainted with the medical art, indicates no want of general knowledge, yet, perhaps, it argues some want of prudence, to speak of subjects to which our acquirements are not adequate.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> See Wardle, *Goldsmith*, pp. 75-ff.

<sup>197</sup> Goldsmith, *Works*, i. 76-77.

<sup>198</sup> Goldsmith, *Works*, i. 79-80; Wardle, *Goldsmith*, pp. 72-80, 189 and notes. Goldsmith "attracted plenty of patients", writes Wardle in discussing Goldsmith's brief stint as a physician in 1756, but "he received few fees. People who could afford medical care were not disposed to call in an unprepossessing Irishman with a thick brogue" (p. 72).

Goldsmith is to be commended here not only for his critical discernment but also for the refinement of his scholarly manners, as he manages to unmask the intellectual emptiness of Hanway's thesis without resorting to the heavy-handed ridicule found in the *Critical* notice. Nevertheless, when compared with Johnson's, Goldsmith's review comes across as rather pallid, if only because Johnson's notice can stand alone as a moral essay. Even readers who are indifferent to, or who despise, Hanway's *Journal* can derive much pleasure and profit from Johnson's review, with its wryly humorous aside on tea-drinking, its historical and economic survey of the tea-trade, and its timeless observations on what were, strictly speaking, contemporary issues.

**Soame Jenyns, *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*:** reviewed 17 May-17 July 1757 (reviewed in the *Monthly* April 1757; in the *Critical* May 1757).

Soame Jenyns (1704-87) was a prominent figure in the social and political establishment of his day, serving in parliament for some forty years and, beginning in 1755, acting as one of the commissioners of the board of trade and plantations. Jenyns also authored numerous poems and works of prose.<sup>199</sup> The most famous of his writings--thanks in no small portion to Johnson's review--is the *Free Inquiry*, a clumsily argued exposition of the optimistic philosophy widely associated with Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733-34) and Voltaire's later *Candide* (1759), which fiercely attacks the concept. Essentially, the *Free Inquiry* attempts to prove that evil occupies a legitimate place in the moral order

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<sup>199</sup> DNB, x. 769-70.

and that all misery ultimately serves a greater humanitarian end.<sup>200</sup> Johnson's rather vitriolic response to the work has been frequently commented upon. Donald Eddy, for instance, correctly points out that Jenyns is ridiculed with such intensity because Johnson was "morally offended" by the irresponsible ideas advanced in *A Free Inquiry*. R. B. Schwartz, meanwhile, avers that Johnson was chiefly irritated by Jenyns's incompetent scholarship. One reason "behind the vehemence of Johnson's attack", Schwartz argues, "is the disparity between the enormity of the subject and the shallowness of Jenyns' treatment of it". Johnson was moved to review the *Free Inquiry* in the first place, Schwartz adds, because he wanted to keep its arguments from encouraging complacency about the plight of the poor, the ad hominem rebukes being the most effective means of delegitimizing Jenyns's ideas.<sup>201</sup> These assessments are certainly accurate but an additional word needs to be said about the ways in which the Jenyns piece embodies Johnson's general views on authorial self-deception. True enough, Johnson plainly despises shallow optimism as portrayed by Jenyns. But it is important for us to recognize that the critical emphasis in the *Literary Magazine* review falls as much on Jenyns's hubris as it does on the philosophical issues in themselves.

In the lead paragraph of the review, for instance, we find Johnson chastising Jenyns not for his advocacy of optimism per se but for assuming that the immensely complex issues addressed in the *Free Inquiry* can be disposed of with ease:

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<sup>200</sup> Soame Jenyns, *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (London, 1757).

<sup>201</sup> Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 93; Yale, iv. 133; Richard B. Schwartz, *Samuel Johnson and the Problem of Evil* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin press, 1975), pp. 22-37; also see W. J. Bate, *Samuel Johnson*, p. 375.

This is a treatise consisting of six letters upon a very difficult and important question, which I am afraid this author's endeavours will not free from the perplexity, which has entangled the speculatists of all ages, and which must always continue while *we see* but *in part*. He calls it a *Free* enquiry, and indeed his *freedom* is, I think greater than his modesty. Though he is far from the contemptible arrogance, or the impious licentiousness of *Bolingbroke*, yet he decides too easily upon questions out of the reach of human determination, with too little consideration of mortal weakness, and with too much vivacity for the necessary caution.<sup>202</sup>

Certainly the nature of evil is a worthy subject to pursue, Johnson acknowledges here, and Jenyns at some level probably means well. What is so vexing for Johnson is the aura of self-satisfaction surrounding the work. Jenyns is convinced that the *Free Inquiry* resolves philosophical conundrums that have stymied the greatest thinkers from antiquity onward, even though his arguments amount to nothing more than an apologia for self-centeredness that many readers will find compelling precisely because of its simple-mindedness.

As the review unfolds, we find that Johnson rarely strays from rebuking Jenyns for his irresponsible authorship. To be sure, Johnson does provide readers with a rigorous and largely even-handed survey of the major issues touched upon in the *Free Inquiry*. Indeed, so thorough is Johnson that, as Donald Eddy points out, the review contains quotations from fifty-one of the treatise's 181 pages of text.<sup>203</sup> But it is the fiery personal

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<sup>202</sup> *LM*, ii. 171; cf. Jenyns's opening statements (*Inquiry*, pp. 1-2): "I imagin'd it might not be unentertaining either to you [Jenyns's unnamed "correspondent"], or myself, to put together my sentiments on these important topics ["metaphysical, moral, political, and religious subjects"], and communicate them to you from time to time as the absence of business, or of more agreeable amusements may afford me opportunity. This I propose to do under the general title of an Inquiry into the Nature, and Origin of Evil; *an Inquiry, which will comprehend them all, and which, I think, has never been attended to with that diligence it deserves, nor with that success, which might have been hoped for from that little that has been bestow'd upon it* [emphasis added]".

<sup>203</sup> Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 76.

reproaches of Jenyns's hubris and self-delusion that define the review. "I am told, that this pamphlet is not the effort of hunger", Johnson observes as he berates Jenyns for manufacturing the second of the *Free Inquiry*'s six letters almost entirely out of material extracted from Pope's *Essay on Man*:

What can it be then but the product of vanity? and yet how can vanity be gratified by plagiarism, or transcription? When this speculatist finds himself prompted to another performance, let him consider whether he is about to disburthen his mind or employ his fingers; and if I might venture to offer him a subject, I should wish that he would solve this question, Why he that has nothing to write, should desire to be a writer.<sup>204</sup>

In another instance Johnson asserts straightforwardly that the polemical failures of the *Free Inquiry* are less of an irritation than is Jenyns's conviction that his muddled or superficial observations are clear-headed and profound.

I do not mean to reproach this author for not knowing what is equally hidden from learning and from ignorance. The shame is to impose words for ideas upon ourselves or others. To imagine that we are going forward when we are only turning around. To think that there is any difference between him that gives no reason, and him that gives a reason, which by his own confession cannot be conceived.<sup>205</sup>

In what is perhaps Johnson's most memorable attack, Jenyns is "hoist by his own petard".

At one point Jenyns attempts to explain away human suffering by claiming that it brings pleasure to higher life forms. These same "beings", Johnson says in response,

now and then catch a mortal, proud of his parts, and flattered either by the submission of those who court his kindness, or the notice of those who suffer him to court theirs. A head thus prepared for the reception of false opinions, and the projection of vain designs, they easily fill with idle notions. . . . Then begins the poor animal to entangle himself in sophisms,

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<sup>204</sup> *LM*, ii. 171.

<sup>205</sup> *LM*, ii. 299 (misnumbered 301).

and flounder in absurdity, to talk confidently of the scale of being, and to give solutions which himself confesses impossible to be understood.<sup>206</sup>

The remarks here could easily serve as the cornerstone for one of Johnson's *Rambler* or *Adventurer* essays on the evils of self-deception. Indeed, the Jenyns piece is important to our understanding of Johnson's outlook on not only authorial self-delusion but the beneficial purposes of all literary activity as well. Jenyns arouses Johnson's anger chiefly because he abuses the authorial role of social and moral luminary. As R. B. Schwartz and others have shown, Johnson fully realized that the concepts advanced in *A Free Inquiry* might easily undermine beneficent activity on both public and private levels: if human misery serves a greater moral good, why tamper with the grand schemes of the Deity? Though Johnson generally does live by his own numerous warnings against domineering or excessively harsh criticism, the potentially inhumane consequences of the ideas advocated in the *Free Inquiry* cried out for a commensurably strong response. In fact, we can read the Jenyns review as an endorsement of the brief but significant exemption to critical reticence allowed for in *Rambler* 93. "There is indeed some tenderness due to living writers", Johnson argues, except "when they attack . . . those truths which are of importance to the happiness of mankind".<sup>207</sup> As far as Johnson is concerned, Jenyns fits squarely into this category. The *Free Inquiry* effectively attempts to legitimate the meanest of human impulses and so its author richly deserves to be thrashed in full view of the public.

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<sup>206</sup> *LM*, ii. 300 (misnumbered 302).

<sup>207</sup> *Yale*, iv. 133.



Do reviews in the two leading journals tell us anything about Johnson's treatment of Jenyns? William Rose's fifteen-page review for the *Monthly* is largely taken up by extract and summary, though Rose does remark on the *Free Inquiry*'s intellectual flimsiness in the beginning of his review--Jenyns's ideas bear a "strong resemblance to those Nostrum-Advertisements we so frequently meet with in our News-papers"--and in his closing remarks--"our Author reduces Omnipotence to numerous difficulties, and endeavours to extricate it by very bungling expedients". Rose rejects the book as does Johnson, certainly, but missing is the passionate indignation found in the *Literary Magazine* piece. Rose's essay has a rather routine, work-a-day quality to it: his brief criticisms largely refer to the forensic qualities of the treatise. The appreciative review of Jenyns in the *Critical*, meanwhile, essentially validates Johnson's assumptions about the attractiveness of Jenyns's facile optimism. In spite of its minor flaws the *Free Inquiry* can be summarized as "a performance of distinguished merit, and apparently the work of an able and judicious writer", the reviewer declares. Whether Johnson managed to read this review before writing his own is impossible to say--the second and third segments of Johnson's review appeared in June and July, after the publication of the *Critical Review* piece in May--but such ill-considered praise must have made Johnson's biting remarks seem all the more necessary.<sup>208</sup>

It is also worth noting that the thirty-page "Preface" to the fourth edition of the *Free Inquiry* (1761) offers a rebuttal to Johnson and other critics of earlier editions. In a

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<sup>208</sup> MR, xvi. 304, 316; CR, iii. 448.

manner reminiscent of *Rambler* 16's "Misellus" and *Idler* 55's "correspondent", Jenyns attributes the worst motives to his critics--"senseless misapprehensions, and malicious misconstructions"--while resolutely defending what he believes are the unacknowledged yet compelling merits of his work. There is "nothing in the sentiments which ought to be retracted", Jenyns asserts, though it is true that stylistic blunders occasionally blight an otherwise meticulously argued thesis.<sup>209</sup> As we saw earlier with Jonas Hanway, the publication of an unfavorable review aroused in Jenyns, who was widely known for his geniality and wit, a surprising and wholly irrational acrimony. In his frequent discussions of authorship in the *Rambler* and elsewhere, Johnson persistently characterizes writing for the marketplace as an emotionally hazardous venture, a gamble of sorts between fame on the one hand and disgrace or oblivion on the other, with aspiring authors being well advised to assume that the odds are against them. The reactions of Hanway and Jenyns to reviews in the *Literary Magazine*--the stubborn refusal to confront even obvious weaknesses; the combative disposition toward legitimate criticisms; the impulse to justify one's imagined achievement despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary--dramatize this very point, thus highlighting further Johnson's keen understanding of the modern authorial sensibility as expressed in his journalistic writings.

The third installment of the Jenyns review (15 July 1757) was Johnson's final contribution to the *Literary Magazine*. Why Johnson left the magazine is not known, nor can it be determined whether he resigned or was fired. The Foundling Hospital

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<sup>209</sup> Soame Jenyns, *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, 4th ed. (London, 1761), pp. ii-xxx.

unpleasantness certainly hastened Johnson's departure, as did Johnson's anti-government essays which probably cost the magazine readers. It is hard to believe that Johnson was hoping for a long-term arrangement with the *Literary Magazine* in any case. "The circulation of the magazine was discouragingly small", Donald Eddy observes, "and it must have hurt his professional pride to be furnishing well-written material to a periodical which few people ever saw". Nothing was keeping Johnson at the *Literary Magazine*, in other words, but there were plenty of good reasons for him to quit.<sup>210</sup>

The sour note which concludes Johnson's tenure at the *Literary Magazine* should not eclipse his achievement as a book reviewer. Johnson's *Literary Magazine* reviews have been under-appreciated until now perhaps because scholars are inclined to evaluate these pieces not by the light of contemporary practices or Johnson's own objectives as a reviewer but in relation to his better known critical writings such as the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Lives of the Poets*. Needless to say, when examined in this manner the *Literary Magazine* reviews on the whole may convey an aura of blandness or carelessness. But when we bear in mind Johnson's understanding of the proper objectives of the book review and prevailing public expectations of reviewing, and when we measure the *Literary Magazine* notices against competing pieces published in the highly influential *Monthly* and *Critical*, Johnson's skill and conscientiousness as a reviewer emerge in full view.

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<sup>210</sup> Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, p. 171; Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, p. 15; Yale, x. 128; Greene, *Politics*, p.



## Chapter Five

### Johnson and the *Critical Review*, 1759-64

How Johnson came to write four reviews for the *Critical* remains a matter for conjecture, but the most likely motivation was personal interest rather than, say, financial need or a desire to take up regular reviewing again. The notices of *Oroonoko* (John Hawkesworth), *The Sugar-Cane* (James Grainger), and *The Traveller* (Oliver Goldsmith) are of works written by friends--or in the case of Grainger, an acquaintance--while the review of George Graham's *Telemachus* evidently sprang from Johnson's personal fondness for the poem.<sup>1</sup> Tobias Smollett--editor of the *Critical* between March 1756 and May 1763--and Johnson knew each other well by the late 1750s, or at least they were on friendly terms. The most likely scenario is that Johnson offered to review *Oroonoko* (December 1759) and *Telemachus* (April 1763) in the *Critical* and Smollett obliged, eager as he must have been to accept contributions from the man whom he had once described as the "'great Cham of literature'".<sup>2</sup> The editorship of the *Critical* following Smollett's departure was assumed by the journal's proprietor Archibald Hamilton (1719-93), who often delegated the responsibility to William Guthrie (1708-70). Hamilton worked for some years as the manager of William Strahan's printing-house before resigning in 1756, so he and Johnson probably got to know each other quite well as the *Dictionary* was being prepared for publication. Guthrie, meanwhile, was a colleague of

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson acknowledged authoring the *Telemachus* and *Traveller* reviews; G. B. Hill's attribution of the *Sugar-Cane* review has never been challenged (see *Boswell's Life*, i. 22, 481-82, and note 4); for the authenticity of the *Oroonoko* review see Brack and Holladay, "Johnson as Patron", p. 182, and note 23.

<sup>2</sup> Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, p. 223; *Boswell's Life*, i. 348; Knapp, *Smollett*, p. 247.

Johnson's at the *Gentleman's Magazine* during the early 1740s. In fact, Johnson helped Guthrie compile the controversial parliamentary debates before taking on the entire project himself. It is thus not hard to believe that the reviews of the *Sugar-Cane* and the *Traveller* (October; December 1764) were published under circumstances similar to the two earlier notices.<sup>3</sup>

Scattered though they are over five years and so few in number, the *Critical* pieces are important nevertheless for what they tell us about Johnson's evolving understanding of reviewing. It is not at all unusual to find Johnson in the *Literary Magazine* and the *Gentleman's* writing sympathetic reviews on behalf of worthy authors struggling to find a readership in a fiercely competitive marketplace. But what surprises are the rather extravagant comparisons Johnson makes between the authors he reviews in the *Critical* and legendary literary figures. Graham at one point is likened to Shakespeare, while Grainger and Goldsmith are favorably compared to, respectively, Virgil and Pope. Though Southerne (1659-1746) is hardly in a class with Shakespeare and Virgil, Johnson would have us believe that Hawkesworth is more talented than the author whose work he revises. The sample may be too small to draw authoritative conclusions, of course, but these four reviews suggest that by the end of the 1750s Johnson had come to believe that the prospects of worthy but unknown authors pivoted

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<sup>3</sup> *British Literary Magazines*, p. 74; Claude E. Jones, "Contributors to the *Critical Review* 1756-1785", *Modern Language Notes* lxi (1946), 433-41; John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London: J. Nichols, son, and Bentley, 1812), iii. 398; J. A. Cochrane, *Dr. Johnson's Printer*, p. 121; Clifford, *Young Sam Johnson*, pp. 180, 246; Basker, *Smollett*, p. 33.

on an ardent and perhaps even an exaggerated endorsement from at least one of the major review journals.

**John Hawkesworth, *Oroonoko*:** reviewed December 1759 (not reviewed in the *Monthly*).<sup>4</sup> Hawkesworth's adaptation of Thomas Southerne's "*Oroonoko*" had already won public approval by the time Johnson's review appeared in early January 1760. The play was first acted at the Drury Lane Theater on 1 December 1759, with David Garrick playing the lead role. Seven more performances were given before the month was out--one by command of the prince of Wales.<sup>5</sup> Why would Johnson bother to review a play that had already proved to be widely popular? That Johnson simply wanted to exalt a work he personally admired is probably at work here. Much more interesting, however, is the possibility that Johnson means to write on behalf of the broader literary ambitions of his friend John Hawkesworth, who at the time was planning to embark on a career as an author of original dramas. Hawkesworth and Johnson had been friends for nearly twenty years when this review appeared; indeed, they had worked closely together as editors of the *Gentleman's Magazine* during the 1740s and were founding members of the Ivy Lane Club, a social group that met regularly during the early 1750s to discuss literary

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<sup>4</sup> The *Monthly* probably did not review Hawkesworth's adaptation because the play itself was not new. Notice of *Oroonoko* is also given in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December 1759 (xxix. 588). The brief commentary essentially amounts to a précis of Hawkesworth's preface, and was perhaps written by Hawkesworth himself.

<sup>5</sup> Abbott, *Hawkesworth*, pp. 79-81.

topics and the news of the day. Thus it would not be at all unusual if Johnson was moved to review *Oroonoko* strictly out of loyalty to a much-admired friend.<sup>6</sup>

The first of Hawkesworth's original dramas to reach the stage, *Edgar and Emmeline*, was not performed until 31 January 1761, thirteen months after Johnson reviewed *Oroonoko* in the *Critical*. But *Edgar* was completed, or nearing completion, by the early spring of 1759, as the following letter to Hawkesworth from David Garrick, whose Drury-Lane Theater would stage the play, demonstrates: "some revolutions & unexpected Matters have arisen, which You shall know when I see You, that will absolutely hinder Us from performing the *Masque* [*Edgar and Emmeline*] next Year, if it was all ready & to our Wishes". Garrick's letter carries a date of 19 April 1759, thus establishing at least the possibility that at some point before the staging of *Oroonoko* in December 1759 Hawkesworth had mentioned to Johnson the imminent performance of *Edgar and Emmeline* and, though strictly a matter for conjecture, Johnson might even have offered critical advice on *Edgar*--and on *Oroonoko*, for that matter--just as he would do at some point in 1760 for an untitled, never-completed drama by Hawkesworth. Certainly Hawkesworth's grandiloquent praises of *Rasselas*--Johnson's novel abounds "with the most elegant and striking pictures of life and nature, the most acute disquisitions, and the happiest illustration of the most important truths"--in the April 1759

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<sup>6</sup> See *Boswell's Life*, i. 190, and note 5; Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, pp. 31-32; also see the "Life of Swift" (1781): "An account of Dr. Swift has been already collected, with great diligence and acuteness, by Dr. Hawkesworth [in 1755], according to a scheme which I laid before him in the intimacy of our friendship. I cannot, therefore, be expected to say much of a life concerning which I had long since communicated my thoughts to a man capable of dignifying his narration with so much elegance of language and force of sentiment" (*Lives*, iii. 1).



issue of the *Gentleman's Magazine* pleased Johnson and perhaps encouraged him to return the favor seven months later.<sup>7</sup>

That Hawkesworth stood to benefit from an appreciative review is suggested by the absence of any specific reference to him in the published version of the play, though the remarks, "Alterations in *Oroonoko* by Dr. Hawkesworth", appear in pre-performance advertisements.<sup>8</sup> The title-page of *Oroonoko* announces Southerne's authorship without mentioning Hawkesworth, though an allusion to Hawkesworth's contributions ("with alterations") appears beneath Southerne's name, unitalicized and set in a smaller type face.<sup>9</sup> Neither the six-page prefatory essay nor the prologue mentions Hawkesworth by name. Not only does Johnson's review dwell on the fact that it was Hawkesworth's alterations that made the play performable in front of contemporary audiences, but readers are encouraged to believe that Hawkesworth, who at the time had no reputation at all as a dramatist, is a far more talented playwright than the widely respected Southerne. Curiously, Hawkesworth is not mentioned by name in the *Critical* notice, perhaps because Johnson assumed that his association with *Oroonoko* was already well-known. Nevertheless, the various characterizations of Hawkesworth in the *Critical*--the "ingenious reviser" of the play; "the writer of the adventitious part"--are uniformly

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<sup>7</sup> *The Letters of David Garrick*, ed. D. M. Little and G. M. Kahrl (London: Oxford UP, 1963), i. 306-07 and note 4; also see Abbott, *Hawkesworth*, pp. 78-85. For *Edgar and Emmeline* see *The London Stage, Part 4: 1747-1776*, ed. G. W. Stone (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1962), ii. 808; Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, p. 245; *GM*, xxix. 186.

<sup>8</sup> See the *London Stage*, ii. 759.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Southern, *Oroonoko: a Tragedy* (London, 1759); Southerne's play (staged in 1695) is itself an adaptation of Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko* (1688).

laudatory and are intended to remind readers that it was an adaptation of *Oroonoko*, and not the original, that pleased theater-goers.<sup>10</sup>

Johnson's intentions are made plain in the opening sentences of the review, where Hawkesworth's talents as a dramatist are highlighted against the inadequacies of Southerne's original work. "The original play, as it came out of the hands of Southern, is well known", Johnson declares, "and the public will only expect from us an account of its alterations. That is was necessary to alter it", Johnson adds, "cannot be denied: the tragic action was interrupted, not only by comic scenes, but by scenes of the lowest buffoonery, and the grossest indecency". What follows is Hawkesworth's twenty-two-line prologue, which emphasizes the necessity of improving on Southerne's essentially meritorious tragedy. Johnson then goes on to quote from Hawkesworth's prefatory essay, where his method of adaptation is set forth. A sequence of appreciative remarks on the material added by Hawkesworth comes next and, again, it is worth noting that the review deliberately focuses on the discernment of Southerne's modern-day editor rather than on the original work.<sup>11</sup> Hawkesworth "has very little indulged declamation, a mode of writing, to which modern tragedies owe much of their excellence, and much of their tediousness", Johnson observes. Hawkesworth has instead opted for short speeches, and he has "lengthened the action by a very rapid dialogue, animated with frequent changes of gesture, and expressions of emotion".<sup>12</sup> All of these ambitious changes, Johnson is careful to point out, have been carried out without compromising the play's dramatic

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<sup>10</sup> *CR*, viii. 480-81.

unity. The "plan of the play proceeds with sufficient regularity, from the first act to the last", Johnson observes, "so well interwoven with the several insertions, that there is no loss of any thing omitted".<sup>13</sup>

Johnson concludes with a reprise of earlier praises. Of importance here is Johnson's assertion that revising Southerne's popular tragedy, as demanding intellectually as it must have been, proved to be unworthy of Hawkesworth's considerable talents. The difficulties of adaptation--retaining unity of action and speech while purging undesirable elements; the necessity of restraining one's creative instincts even if superior to the original author's--are "obstructions, by which the strongest genius must be shackled and retarded, and the writer who can equal Southern under such difficulties, may be expected to excel greater authors, when he shall exert his natural powers without impediment, by adapting his own sentiments to his own plan".<sup>14</sup> Readers and theatergoers who enjoyed Hawkesworth's adaptation of Southerne's play, we are thus given to understand, should eagerly anticipate the day when the "ingenious revisor" of Southerne's *Oroonoko* offers the public an original composition.

While it is impossible to prove conclusively that Johnson wrote the *Oroonoko* review with the imminent production of *Edgar and Emmeline* specifically in mind, the evidence at hand suggests strongly that he did so. For Johnson to employ the book review as a means of bolstering a friend's literary reputation, moreover, was hardly

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<sup>11</sup> CR, viii. 480-82; also see Southern, *Oroonoko*, "Prologue", and p. v.

<sup>12</sup> CR, viii. 482.

<sup>13</sup> CR, viii. 482.

<sup>14</sup> CR, viii. 486.

without precedent. Johnson's highly flattering review of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) bears witness to this and, to a lesser extent, so does the commentary on Warton's *Essay on Pope* (1756). But perhaps the most significant aspect of the *Oroonoko* review is that we find Johnson embracing a degree of critical assertiveness rarely seen in the earlier *Literary Magazine* reviews.

**George Graham, *Telemachus, A Mask*:** reviewed in the *Critical* April 1763 (reviewed in the *Monthly* February 1763). George Graham (1728?-67) earned his living as a teacher and administrator at Eton College, though he evidently entertained keen hopes of making a name for himself as a dramatist and a poet. Thus the dismissive review in the *Monthly* of his only published work, *Telemachus*, must have come as a great disappointment.<sup>15</sup> "There is not in the province of Drama any species of composition so favourable to genius, and so capable of pure poetry, as the Mask", declares John Langhorne in the opening sentence of his review. "Unrestrained by time or place, and inattentive to the rules of order and probability, the Poet is at full liberty to indulge all the powers of imagination, in description, passion, and machinery". Readers aware of the full aesthetic possibilities of the mask, however, are bound to be disappointed by *Telemachus*. Though Graham's "Muse is correct and decent", Langhorne observes, his "images bear no marks of original genius; his moral sentiments are not uncommon, and his argumentative conversations are often flat, and always too long".<sup>16</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup> See Courtney, *Bibliography*, p. 102; Garrick, *Letters*, i. 386, ii. 471, 475, and notes.

<sup>16</sup> *MR*, xxviii. 109.

short, Graham's *Telemachus* amounts to a remarkably dull piece of work, all the more so given the possibilities of the genre it represents.

In direct contrast to the reception of *Telemachus* in the *Monthly*, Johnson found Graham's moralistic adaptation of the Odysseus legend to be very much in line with his own outlook on fiction. Indeed, Johnson so admired *Telemachus* that years later he would persist in asking Boswell to send him a copy of a particularly fine edition of the poem published by the Foulis Press in Glasgow. How Johnson came to review *Telemachus* in the first place is not quite clear. At some point--no date of any kind is available--Graham occupied a place in Johnson's constantly growing inventory of acquaintances, so it is not hard to imagine him seeking a favorable review from Johnson either personally or through their mutual friend David Garrick.<sup>17</sup> What makes this such an attractive possibility is that Johnson's review seems to concern itself chiefly with rebutting Langhorne's criticisms of two months earlier. Take for instance the opening remarks of Johnson's notice, which evidently respond to Langhorne's claim that Graham's poem relies too heavily on shopworn themes:

The contention between pleasure and virtue, a struggle which will always be continued while the present system of nature shall subsist, has now furnished another author with the matter of a poem. We are far from any intention of charging him with the choice of a trite or exhausted subject, for the truth is, that there is no other to be chosen; for by this conflict of opposite principles, modified and determined by innumerable diversities of external circumstances, are produced all the varieties of human life; nor

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<sup>17</sup> *Letters*, ii. 214; iii. 9; for Johnson and Graham see *Boswell's Life*, v. 97; for Graham and Garrick see Courtney, *Bibliography*, p. 102.

can history or poetry exhibit more than pleasure triumphing over virtue,  
and virtue subjugating pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

Graham is fully justified in choosing "not uncommon" moral sentiments, Johnson avers, there being no others worthy of an author's attentions.

Doubtless the most striking illustration of Johnson's attempt to answer the *Monthly's* depreciative notice is the favorable comparison of Graham to Shakespeare. "Shakespear is admired for having brought upon the stage beings of a peculiar order, which exist only in his own imagination", Johnson observes. Graham "likewise has endeavoured to shew the effects of passion upon minds superior in powers to humanity, yet not exalted to impassive dignity". Not quite so breathtaking but equally revelatory of Johnson's intentions is the commentary which follows an extract featuring an exchange between "Calypso" and "Telemachus". "The poet has artfully made his hero use the very same argument afterwards in defence of pleasure", Johnson declares, "which he now offers for refusing it; so differently do we think of the same things in different states of mind". That Johnson wants his readers to think highly of Graham's narrative talents is obvious enough here, but these remarks can also be read as a rebuttal to Langhorne's claim that Graham's "argumentative conversations" lack spirit.<sup>19</sup>

The review concludes with spirited praise: "we recommend the fertility of imagination, the depth of sentiment, and the knowledge of passion, which are occasionally displayed", Johnson asserts, "to the observation of those readers who have

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<sup>18</sup> CR, xv. 314; cf. the prologue to *Telemachus, A Mask* (London, 1763), spoken by "Mentor": "For 'tis my task/ (A task superior to all mortal toil)/ This day to save the pure untainted heart/ Of young Telemachus, his royal charge,/ From foul pollution, and the desperate woes/ That follow Virtue's loss" (p. 3).

skill to discern, and delicacy to taste them". Interestingly, the meritorious features given here answer Langhorne's objections point for point: Graham's "images bear no marks of original genius; his moral sentiments are not uncommon, and his argumentative conversations are often flat, and always too long". As we find so often with Johnson's book reviewing, the *Telemachus* notice is meant to help a worthy but fallible author--Johnson does admit that genius is only "occasionally displayed" in the poem--gain a foothold in the marketplace in the face of evidently unjust criticisms published in one of the leading review journals.<sup>20</sup>

**James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane*:** reviewed in the *Critical* October 1764 (reviewed in the *Monthly* August 1764). A physician by profession, James Grainger (1721-66) also managed to carve a small niche for himself in the world of the belles lettres. Between 1756 and 1758 Grainger wrote some three-dozen notices for the highly influential *Monthly Review*, and his earlier "Ode to Solitude" was awarded a measure of status when it appeared in the fourth volume of Robert Dodsley's *Collection of Poems* (1755), which also included works by William Collins, Thomas Gray (*Elegy Wrote in a Country Churchyard*), Johnson (*Vanity of Human Wishes*), and Joseph Warton. In April 1759 Grainger traveled to the West Indies as the attending physician of John Bourryau, an heir to extensive properties there. Five years later Grainger brought forth the *Sugar-Cane*, a poetical account of the Caribbean sugar industry.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> CR, xv. 314-15.

<sup>20</sup> CR, xv. 318.

<sup>21</sup> James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane: a Poem in Four Books* (London, 1764); DNB, viii. 368-69; Straus, *Dodsley*, pp. 103-36.

Writing for the *Monthly*, John Langhorne offers readers a polite but firmly dismissive account of Grainger's poem. The provincial subject matter of the *Sugar-Cane* cannot possibly appeal to a "European" reader, Langhorne asserts, and the preponderance of "Terms of art"--not to mention the many references to "Indian names of trees, and herbs, and fruits"--scarcely helps matters.<sup>22</sup> Equally significant is Grainger's ill-considered decision to model his style on that of Hesiod, even though a more ornate mode of expression patterned on Virgil's *Georgics* would have been more in keeping with contemporary tastes. "There could be no doubt that the learned and ingenious Author of the *Sugar Cane*", Langhorne argues,

knew that he was writing to an age not less luxurious or refined, nor less impatient of whatever has merely the merit of serious utility than Rome itself, during the infancy of its imperial state.---He knew, surely, that the Ascrean simplicity was by no means characteristic of these days, and that to write more like Hesiod than like Virgil, would be to write in vain. Yet whether Dr. Grainger meant it as a compliment to the genius and disposition of his country, or whether something like ancient simplicity may not really exist in our Western Colonies, it is certain that he has made his *Sugar Cane* rather an useful than an entertaining poem.<sup>23</sup>

Langhorne does manage a word of praise for Grainger's scholarly notes, which are to be considered "both in their medical and botanical capacity, as a very valuable part of the work"; and Grainger's reputation as a poet is duly acknowledged in the review's closing sentences. "The Reader had no need of these quotations to inform him of Dr. Grainger's poetical abilities", Langhorne states, but "we have quoted them for his [the reader's] entertainment, as well as to do the Author justice; and hope, that in neither of these

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<sup>22</sup> *MR*, xxxi. 106.



respects we have laboured in vain".<sup>24</sup> On the whole, however, we are left with the impression that the *Sugar-Cane* will disappoint all but the least demanding of readers.

Not much is known about Johnson's relationship with James Grainger apart from the fact that Johnson agreed to review the *Sugar-Cane* in the *Critical* and that Grainger was very much grateful to Johnson for doing so.<sup>25</sup> And well he should have been. Though a harsh word is said about Grainger's indifference to the slave trade, the *Sugar-Cane* review must rank as Johnson's most appreciative. Indeed, the extravagance of Johnson's praise is fully grasped only when we recall his private contempt for the poem. "What could he make of a sugar-cane?", Johnson told Boswell in 1777. "One might as well write 'The Parsely-bed, a Poem,' or 'The Cabbage-garden, a Poem'". Also suggestive of Johnson's low opinion of the *Sugar-Cane*, perhaps, is the much blander and skimpier review which he and Thomas Percy wrote for the *London Chronicle* in July 1764. E. A. Bloom avers that the intensity of the later review was at some level a response to the *Sugar-Cane*'s stubbornly poor sales. This is probably true but we should not overlook the equally interesting possibility that the *Critical* piece was written specifically to answer John Langhorne's earlier review in the *Monthly*.<sup>26</sup>

Take for instance the lead sentences of the *Critical* piece, which can be said to address Langhorne's claim that the *Sugar-Cane* fails to comply with contemporary tastes.

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<sup>23</sup> MR, xxxi. 106.

<sup>24</sup> MR, xxxi. 106, 118.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson had known Grainger at least since 1756 (*Boswell's Life*, i. 48 and note 2).

<sup>26</sup> *Boswell's Life*, ii. 454. Hazen, *Prefaces and Dedications*, pp. 168-71; Bloom, *Grub Street*, p. 204; also see *Boswell's Life*, i. 481-82, and note.

Particularly noteworthy is Johnson's mimicry of Langhorne's reference to the "European" reader:

There are some works in which the exertion of a poet's genius may be very great, and yet his success but moderate. To pursue the topic of the day, or to prop a declining party, are generally sure of immediate applause; but in proportion as such poets write to the present world, they must forego their claims to posterity. If we were to judge of the work before us from its reception among the public, or its aptitude to catch the attention of a common European reader, our criticism might only tend to encrease our ingenious author's displeasure.<sup>27</sup>

That the *Sugar-Cane* betrays an indifference to prevailing fashion, in other words, tells us little about the poem's worthiness and may even betoken a transcendent greatness.

Much of the rest of the review also appears to develop around the criticisms published in the *Monthly*. Langhorne's observation on the dullness and obscurity of the *Sugar-Cane*, for instance, is answered directly in what is for Johnson unusually lofty praise directed at a living writer. Of special interest is Johnson's comparison of Grainger to Garcilaso de la Vega and Luis de Camoens, two Renaissance poets renowned as much for their adventurous lives as for their literary achievements.<sup>28</sup>

the reader must not be deterred by the title-page, since the most languid will here find his passions excited, and the imagination indulged to the highest pitch of luxury. A new creation is offered, of which an European has scarce any conception; the hurricane, the burning winds, a ripe cane-piece on fire at midnight; an Indian prospect after a finished crop, and nature in all the extremes of tropic exuberance. It is, indeed, a little extraordinary how regions so poetically striking, and so well known to the merchant, have been so little visited by the muse: and that while the

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<sup>27</sup> CR, xviii. 270 (misnumbered 170).

<sup>28</sup> Camoens (1524-80), Portuguese poet and playwright, and Garcilaso (1501-36), Spanish poet, were both soldiers as well, Camoens losing an eye in the service against the Moors while Garcilaso was killed in battle fighting for King Charles V: see the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th ed. (Oxford, 1985), pp. 162-63, 379.

Spaniards boast their Garcillasso, and the Portuguese their Camoens, we have been destitute till now of an American poet, that could bear any degree of competition.<sup>29</sup>

*The Sugar-Cane* triumphantly unites the powers of the imagination with real-world experience, in other words. Ambitious and "languid" readers alike will take much delight in Grainger's insightful observations, conveyed as they are by a graceful poetic idiom. Far from being an insipid, trifling piece, Johnson would have us believe, Grainger's poem ultimately amounts to an historically significant contribution to English letters.

Easily the most striking feature of Johnson's review is the persistent and flattering comparisons of Grainger to Virgil, which are evidently meant to rebut Langhorne's criticism of Grainger for failing to model his poem on Virgil's *Georgics*. "The character of a good planter is beautifully described", Johnson observes at one point, "and will bring to the reader's memory Virgil's description of the pleasures of a husbandman".<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere, Grainger is characterized as the most accomplished of recent Virgilian imitators:

It has been remarked of Virgil that he rises in every book: on the contrary Dyer, Philips, and some others, who have pursued his plan, grow languid as they proceed, as if fatigued with their career. Our poet happily improves in his progress; and as the *taedium* of reading increases, he makes the interest increase proportionably.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly enough, Grainger is ranked above John Dyer (1699-1758) and John Philips (1676-1709), whose works would eventually be included in the prestigious *Works of the English Poets*, an enterprise remembered nowadays chiefly for its association with

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<sup>29</sup> CR, xviii. 271.

Johnson's prefatory "Lives". Hardly less noteworthy here is Johnson's praise for Grainger's ability to delight readers even in the latter stages of the poem--an implicit rejection of Langhorne's claim that the *Sugar-Cane* amounts to "rather an useful than an entertaining poem". Eye-catching though some of Johnson's specific observations may be, the review is significant not for any one critical principle conveyed here but for what it reveals about Johnson's understanding of the influence of book reviewing in the 1760s. Johnson assumed, it seems, that his decision to write an appreciative notice of the *Sugar-Cane* entailed the kind of fulsomeness he would have rejected out of hand ten years earlier.

**Oliver Goldsmith, *The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society*:** reviewed in the *Critical* December 1764 (reviewed in the *Monthly* January 1765). By all accounts, the friendship between Oliver Goldsmith and Samuel Johnson began in 1759 and lasted until Goldsmith's death in 1774.<sup>32</sup> Though the two men did not always get along well--Goldsmith, it seems, was jealous of Johnson's great success; Johnson was occasionally irked by Goldsmith's clownish and pretentious disposition--their unwavering admiration of each other's literary abilities cannot be questioned.<sup>33</sup> It is worth recalling, for instance, that Goldsmith addressed the comedy *She Stoops to Conquer* to Johnson (1773). "It may do some honour to inform the public, that I have lived many years in intimacy with you", Goldsmith states in the dedication. "It may serve the interests of mankind also to inform

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<sup>30</sup> CR, xviii. 272.

<sup>31</sup> CR, xviii. 273.

<sup>32</sup> *Boswell's Life*, v. 274, note 3; Wardle, *Goldsmith*, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> See *Boswell's Life*, ii. 216, 236, 253-54, 257.

them, that the greatest wit may be found in a character, without impairing the most unaffected piety". Johnson offered similarly high praise of Goldsmith in the "Life of Parnell" (1781). "The Life of Parnell is a task I should very willingly decline", Johnson states in the opening sentence, "since it has been lately written by Goldsmith, a man of such variety of powers and such felicity of performance that he always seemed to do best that which he was doing".<sup>34</sup> Hardly less significant is that Johnson helped Goldsmith at a crucial point in his career by contributing ten lines to the *Traveller*. Johnson also arranged to review the *Traveller*--the first of Goldsmith's works to carry his name on the title page--in the *Critical Review*.<sup>35</sup>

Appearing two weeks or so after the *Traveller's* publication, Johnson's review features generous extracts strung together with occasionally flattering but hardly impassioned critical commentary, of which the following is a typical example.<sup>36</sup> "The author already appears, by his numbers, to be a versifier", Johnson writes, "and by his scenery, to be a poet; it therefore remains that his sentiments discover him to be a just estimator of comparative happiness". Interestingly, in the final sentence of the review the then-largely unknown Goldsmith is favorably compared to Alexander Pope, though for some reason Johnson chose not to elaborate on the remark. "Such is this poem, on which we now congratulate the public, as on a production to which, since the death of Pope, it will not be easy to find any thing equal". Johnson appears to be making two points here.

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<sup>34</sup> Goldsmith, *Works*, v. 101; *Lives*, ii. 49.

<sup>35</sup> See *The Poems of Samuel Johnson*, ed. D. N. Smith and E. L. McAdam (Oxford, 1974), pp. 177, 438-39; Courtney, *Bibliography*, p. 113.

<sup>36</sup> *The Traveller* was published on 19 December 1759 (Wardle, *Goldsmith*, pp. 156-60).

The first and more obvious concerns the great merit of the *Traveller*, the handiwork, we are given to understand, of an up-and-coming poet. Less obvious but perhaps of greater significance is the possibility that Johnson here means to criticize the growing popularity of what we would think of nowadays as Romantic strains in poetry. The *Traveller* relies heavily on the very neoclassical devices--rhymed couplets; straightforward description rather than suggestion; well-ordered progression from one idea to the next--that had been falling out of fashion at least since the late 1740s, a circumstance Johnson allusively bemoans when he characterizes the *Traveller* as the finest example of poetry since the death of the greatest of Augustan poets.<sup>37</sup>

Johnson's review of the *Traveller* amounts to a solid endorsement, yet in relation to the three earlier pieces in the *Critical* the Goldsmith notice is remarkably subdued. Why? There is no obvious explanation for this. By all accounts Johnson's commentary in the *Critical* mirrored his private opinion of the *Traveller*, so it cannot be said that the review betrays a reluctance in Johnson to make claims he really didn't believe.<sup>38</sup> One plausible explanation for the relative blandness of the review is that it appeared before competing notices published elsewhere (though these reviews are uniformly favorable), so there was no existing criticism for Johnson to refute or otherwise react to.<sup>39</sup> Had the *Monthly* published a scathing rejection of the *Traveller* before Johnson got around to writing his review, perhaps the *Critical* piece would have turned out much differently.

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<sup>37</sup> CR, xviii. 458-62; Wardle, *Goldsmith*, pp. 158-60; also see Clifford, *Dictionary Johnson*, p. 246.

<sup>38</sup> See *Boswell's Life*, ii. 5.

<sup>39</sup> MR, xxxii. 47-55; GM, xxxiv. 594; also see Wardle, *Goldsmith*, p. 160 and *Boswell's Life*, ii. 478.

Why Johnson ceased writing reviews after 1764 remains a mystery, all the more so given the publication of works that we can imagine him reviewing with some relish: Anna Williams's *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1766); Goldsmith's *the Deserted Village* (1770); Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776); John Howard's *State of the Prisons* (1777); Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778); Thomas Davies's *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*; George Crabbe's *The Village* (1783). That Johnson did not review the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), written by fellow Club member Edward Gibbon, or Gibbon's rebuttal to critics published in 1779, is particularly surprising given the controversy provoked by the disdainful treatment of Christianity in the *Decline's* fifteenth and sixteenth chapters.<sup>40</sup> One might suppose that Gibbon's views were at least as worthy of Johnson's reproaches as were Jenyns's breezy optimism about poverty or Blackwell's overly zealous republicanism.

One credible explanation for Johnson's refusal to write reviews after 1764 is that no congenial platform for reviewing existed as Johnson preferred to practice it. Indeed, we can interpret the relative tepidity of the *Traveller* review as a sign that Johnson could no longer bring himself to write the kind of dogmatical or assertive commentary that reviewing in the lead journals demanded from the mid-1750s onward.<sup>41</sup> Also possible is that Johnson, keenly aware of his vast and rather controversial reputation--"I believe there is hardly a day in which there is not something about me in the newspapers", he told Boswell in 1781--did not want his opinions to eclipse the work under review or to

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<sup>40</sup> Gibbon joined the Club in 1774 (*Boswell's Life*, i. 481, note 3).

allow his reputation as the great Cham of literature to influence unduly popular judgment. Reviews were published anonymously during Johnson's lifetime, true. But as the reception of *Rasselas* (1759) had demonstrated, Johnson could not expect his identity to remain a secret for very long.<sup>42</sup> Evidence of Johnson's views on the potential impact of his celebrity can be found in Thomas Tyers's brief biography, which appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* a few weeks after Johnson's death:

He [Johnson] did not choose to have his sentiments generally known; for there was a great eagerness, especially in those who had not the pole-star of judgment to direct them, to be taught what to think or say on literary performances. 'What does Johnson say of such a book?' was the question of every day. Besides, he did not want to increase the number of his enemies, which his decisions and criticisms had created him.<sup>43</sup>

Johnson's reluctance to make himself heard regarding the works of contemporaries from the mid-1760s onward was well justified, as H. L. McGuffie's bibliography of Johnson's reception in the contemporary press demonstrates. Take for instance the announcement of Johnson's pension in the press (1762), which spawned a multitude of responses to the equally numerous attacks on Johnson. The sparring over Johnson's pension went on for years--as late as the fall of 1765 the *St. James Chronicle* and the *Public Ledger* were printing and reprinting commentaries on the issue. These pieces were themselves subject to review in pamphlets, newspaper essays, and in the major review journals as well, so defending or attacking Johnson's reputation took on a literary life of its own. It is scarcely any wonder, then, that when Johnson set out to assist worthy authors during the

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<sup>41</sup> See Forster, "Reviewers, Authors, and the Reading Public", chapter three (pp. 162-224).

<sup>42</sup> *Boswell's Life*, iv. 127; *Letters*, i. 179; *Yale*, xvi. xlv-xlix.

<sup>43</sup> *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ii. 345.



last twenty years of his life, he did so discreetly by offering advice in private correspondences, for instance, or by anonymously authoring prefaces and dedications.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See McGuffie, *Johnson and the British Press*, pp. 26-ff; *NCBEL*, columns 1147-50.

## Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to shed new light on Samuel Johnson's practices as a book reviewer. Chapter One briefly surveyed the development of book reviewing during Johnson's lifetime, with particular attention being given to the key characteristics of the two leading journals of the period, the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*. The second chapter sought to illuminate an under-appreciated aspect of Johnson's interest in book reviewing by examining the extent to which it can be said that he commented on recently published works in the *Rambler*, *Adventurer*, and *Idler* essay serials. Only nine of Johnson's 335 serial essays can be placed in this category. Nevertheless, these few essays reflect Johnson's interest in the contemporary literary world and, more importantly, demonstrate that he was receptive to the concept of book reviewing years before he undertook regular reviewing in the *Literary Magazine*. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters respectively analyzed Johnson's reviewing in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Literary Magazine*, and *Critical Review*. These three chapters have attempted to illustrate in particular that Johnson's reviews--when evaluated in relation to contemporary practices and in full consideration of Johnson's own objectives as reviewer--are for the most part deftly executed critical essays. Overall, this thesis has sought to demonstrate that Johnson was a skillful and conscientious book reviewer, an endeavor which can only highlight further his versatility as a literary critic.

## Appendix A: the Canon of Johnson's Book Reviews

In his survey of Johnson's reviewing in the *Literary Magazine*, Donald Eddy avers that Johnson did not write the notice of Richard Lovett's *the Subtil Medium Proved* or that of Hoadly and Wilson's *Observations on a series of Electrical Experiments*. Curiously, Eddy offers no reason for disagreeing with Donald Greene, who initially made what remains a convincing case for Johnson's authorship in his essay, "Johnson's Contributions to the *Literary Magazine*, and J. D. Fleeman, who accepts Greene's attributions in the *NCBEL*. The weight of scholarly opinion falls on the side of accepting these notices as Johnson's, so they are treated as such here. One other piece previously accepted as Johnson's but rejected by Eddy deserves consideration. In his 1956 essay Greene claims that the notice of Bouchier Cleeve's *A Scheme for preventing a further Increase of the National Debt* is unquestionably Johnson's, an attribution accepted by J. D. Fleeman. Eddy concedes that Johnson "may have written" the piece, though he refuses to include it in his list of Johnson's reviews on the grounds that "all the extracts used in the review are verbatim quotations and do not show any Johnsonian abridgements". The reviewer's reliance on direct quotation scarcely amounts to a creditable case against Johnson's authorship, if only because many of Johnson's known reviews carry verbatim quotations--as Eddy himself admits elsewhere in his volume.<sup>1</sup> More significantly, Eddy makes no attempt to reject the evidence--the parallels of style; the denunciation of excise commissioners--which led Greene to attribute the review to

Johnson in the first place. Also relevant is this anecdote, related by Hester Lynch Piozzi, which demonstrates that Johnson indulged more than a superficial interest in the national debt:

[Johnson] shewed me a calculation which I could scarce be made to understand, so vast was the plan of it, and so very intricate were the figures: no other indeed than the national debt . . . [which] would, if converted into silver, serve to make a meridian of that metal, I forgot how broad, for the globe of the whole earth, the real *globe*.<sup>2</sup>

The accumulation of external and internal evidence along with the source of attribution argue for accepting the Cleeve notice as authentic even though conclusive proof is lacking.

One work ought to be removed from Eddy's list of Johnson's reviews. Though undoubtedly from Johnson's hand, the piece entitled "The History of Minorca" should not be considered as a book review. The piece contains no critical commentary, nor are prospective book buyers provided with the standard bibliographical data found in period book reviews.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the one bit of descriptive data present is unusual for a review and grossly inaccurate besides. Johnson cites a publication year of 1740, though editions were printed in 1752 and 1756. The abridgment is perhaps best understood as news-writing rather than reviewing, as Johnson himself suggests in his introductory remarks:

At this time, when the eyes of Europe are turned upon the expedition of the French against PORT-MAHON, the public will naturally require some

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<sup>1</sup> Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 84-87, 102 and note; Greene, "Johnson's Contributions to the *Literary Magazine*", pp. 384-88; *NCBEL*, column 1141.

<sup>2</sup> Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., during the Last Twenty Years of His Life*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (London: OUP, 1974), pp. 86-87.

<sup>3</sup> Forster, *Book Reviews: 1749-1774*, p. 4.

account of the island of MINORCA, which we shall extract from the history written in the form of letters, by Mr. Armstrong, in 1740 [sic].<sup>4</sup>

Johnson's intent, clearly, is to publicize information on a location that promises to dominate the headlines in the coming months rather than to give notice to a recently published work.

Listed below are the reviews firmly accepted as Johnson's.

*Gentleman's Magazine*<sup>5</sup>

1. *Account of the conduct of the Duchess of Marlborough* (xii. 128-31).
2. Benito Feijo, *An Exposition of the uncertainties in the practice of physic* (xxi. 95).
3. Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote* (xxii. 146).
4. Edward Moore, *The Gamester: a new Tragedy* (xxiii. 59-61).
5. *Virginia* (xxiv. 128-29).
6. Saunders Welch, *Observations on the office of a constable* (xxiv. 144-45).
7. Philip Frances, *Constantine: a new Tragedy* (xxiv. 178-181).
8. William Whitehead, *Creusa, a new Tragedy* (xxiv. 227-29).
9. William Tytler, *An Enquiry into the Evidence against Mary Queen of Scots* (xxx. 453-56).

*Literary Magazine*<sup>6</sup>

1. Stephen White, *Collateral Bee-Boxes* (i. 27-28).
2. Thomas Birch, *The History of the Royal Society* (i. 30-32).

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<sup>4</sup> *LM*, i. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Source: *NCBEL*, columns 1137-40.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Eddy, *Book Reviewer*, pp. 29-32.

3. Arthur Murphy, *The Gray's-Inn Journal* (i. 32-35).
4. Joseph Warton, *Essay on Pope* (i. 35-38).
5. James Hampton, *History of Polybius* (i. 39-41).
6. Thomas Blackwell, *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus* (i. 41-42, 239-41).
7. Alexander Russell, *The Natural History of Aleppo* (i. 80-86).
8. Sir Isaac Newton, *Four Letters to Bentley* (i. 89-91).
9. William Borlase, *Observations on the Islands of Scilly* (i. 91-97).
10. John Douglas, *Six Letters from A--d B--r* (i. 126-33).
11. Archibald Bower, *Affidavit* (i. 126-33).
12. Francis Home, *Experiments on Bleaching* (i. 136-41).
13. Sir Thomas Browne, *Christian Morals* (i. 141-43).
14. Stephen Hales, *An Account of a Useful Discovery* (i. 143-45).
15. Charles Lucas, *An Essay on Waters* (i. 167-68, 225-29, 288-93).
16. Robert Keith, *A Large New Catalogue of Bishops of . . . Scotland* (i. 171-76).
17. Patrick Browne, *Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (i. 176-85).
18. Charles Parkin, *Account of the Invasion under William Duke of Normandy* (i. 186-88).
19. Bouchier Cleeve, *A Scheme for preventing a further Increase of the National Debt* (i. 188-91).
20. *Philosophical Transactions* (i. 193-97).
21. Richard Lovett, *The Subtle Medium Proved* (i. 231-34).

22. Dr. Hoadly and Mr. Wilson, *Observations of a Series of Electrical Experiments* (i. 234-39).
23. Johann Georg Keysler, *Travels Through Germany* (i. 240-47).
24. Charlotte Lennox, *Memoirs of the Duke of Sully* (i. 281-82).
25. Elizabeth Harrison, *Miscellanies* (i. 282-88).
26. Lewis Evans, *Geographical Essays* (i. 293-99).
27. *A Letter relative to the Case of Admiral Byng* (anonymous) (i. 299-309).
28. John Shebbeare, *An Appeal to the People . . . Part I* (i. 299-309).
29. Jonas Hanway, *A Journal of Eight Days Journey* (i. 335-42).
30. Samuel Bever, *The Cadet* (i. 343 [misnumbered 335]).
31. Paul Whitehead, *Some Further Particulars in relation to Admiral Byng* (i. 344-48 [misnumbered 336-40]).
32. David Mallet, *The Conduct of the Ministry Impartially Examined* (i. 348-51 [pages 348-50 misnumbered 340-42]).
33. John Douglas, *Bower and Tillemont compared* (i. 442-53).
34. Archibald Bower, *Answer to a scurrilous Pamphlet* (i. 442-53).
35. Arthur Murphy et. al., *The Test* (i. 453-61).
36. Owen Ruffhead et. al., *The Con-Test* (i. 453-61).
37. William Whitehead, *Elegies, with an Ode to the Tiber* (ii. 31)
38. Paul Whitehead, *A Letter to a Gentleman in the Country* (i. 116-20).
39. Jonas Hanway, *A Journal of Eight Days* (ii. 162 [misnumbered 161]-167).

40. Soame Jenyns, *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (ii. 251-53, 299-304 [misnumbered 301-06]).
41. Jonas Hanway, A Paper in the *Gazetteer* of May 26, 1757 (ii. 253-256 [misnumbered 356]).



*Critical Review*<sup>7</sup>

1. John Hawkesworth, *Oroonoko* (viii. 480-86).
2. George Graham, *Telemachus: A Mask* (xv. 314-18).
3. James Grainger, *Sugar-cane* (xviii. 270-277 [pp. 270-72 misnumbered 170-72]).
4. Oliver Goldsmith, *The Traveller* (xviii. 458-62).

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<sup>7</sup> Source: *NCBEL*, column 1136.

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